

LONDON MYSTERY SELECTION, No. 89

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# LONDON MYSTERY

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CRIME, MYSTERY & DETECTIVE

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No.  
89



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**THE LONDON  
MYSTERY SELECTION**





# THE LONDON MYSTERY SELECTION NUMBER EIGHTY-NINE

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## CROOKS IN BOOKS

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A quarterly review of some of the finest mystery and detective books recently published appears on PAGES 117-127

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## THE LONDON MYSTERY SELECTION

That famous Victorian statesman Disraeli said once that man is either an ape or an angel. Blunt words but true—and often it's entirely a matter of chance. Take, for example, an employee who suddenly finds that his everyday knowledge of his routine job can bring him a £500 gift from crooks planning a large-scale robbery. Or a wife, existing for years with a brutal, womanising husband, who finds when he's ill that a simple overdose of medicine can rid her of him for ever. Or a hot-tempered man who hits out suddenly and finds he's a murderer.

Sometimes a person can be ape and angel in turn . . . like the man who was Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde. But it doesn't need phantasy. The financier who in the morning arranges to ruin small shareholders may in the evening be a loving father and husband, delighting in the comfort and security he's providing for his family. And on the other side of the scales, the ruthlessness and cold-blooded determination that might have made a man a killer for gain may instead cause him to spend his life as a detective or policeman serving the essential ends of justice and protecting the community.

This isn't moralising. It's the stuff of life; its fabric, texture and pattern. That's why the emotions and actions of men and women, for good or evil, are of absorbing interest and are fascinating to follow. So are the scenes in which they are set; life can be dramatic in a dark alley . . . and spine-chilling in a suburban sitting-room.

THE EDITOR.

**“I’ve always wanted to be a dress designer. I used to do all my own clothes before the accident. Sometimes now I look at the fashions and I know I could do just as well. If I had my hands.”**

(Sheila, 18)



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**REHABILITATION OF THE DISABLED**



# A HANK OF HAIR

JOHN TAVERNER

*He opened the parcel, carefully removed the  
bones and skull . . .*

*Illustrated by Buster*

She shivered as she stepped out of the comparative warmth of the tube station into the cold, blustering wind. The wet road glistened blackly under the glare of the curved lamp standards, and she swore as a passing taxi churned through a puddle to spray her nylon-covered legs with dirty water. She wondered irritably if he was telling the truth this time. If it was another of his cock-and-bull stories she'd raise sheer hell for him. It was his last chance . . .

She turned down a dimly-lit mean street, and then took the first turning to the left as he had instructed. She went past the padlocked gates of a car dump, and then spotted the ruined shell of the Church of Saint John on the corner ahead. As she approached the Church a man detached himself from its dark shadow.

"You're late," he said.

"Get off your bloody perch!" she flared. "I haven't come all this way in this stinking weather to listen to—"

"Take it easy, old girl," he said placatingly. "Just wait until your peepers see what I've got to show you."

"It'd better be worth while . . ."

"When we've disposed of it, you'll never have to do another day's work in your life," he said, and laughed softly.

Avarice took command of her short temper. "You mean it this time, don't you. . . ? But why all the mysterious bunk? I'm not to tell a soul where I'm going, and—"

"You didn't tell anyone?" he said, his voice tinged with anxiety.

"Of course I didn't—but I want to know why. I—"

"Come on inside. When you see what I've got stashed away you'll understand why," he said. "It's worth a small fortune . . ."

Footsteps rang on the pavement of the far corner, and he grasped her arm. "The door's open. Inside—quickly! I don't want anyone to see us hanging around here . . ."

He drew her inside, and quietly shut the door. The ruined Church had a musty composite smell of decay and damp, and, as her eyes became accustomed to the darkness, she saw that most of the roof was missing.

"What happened to the place?" she whispered.

"It was blitzed during the war," he whispered back.

The footsteps went past the door and then receded away down the pavement. She heard a key grating in the lock, and then he switched on a torch. He played the beam of the torch around them; over the rotting pews which had been splintered by the fallen roof tiles; over the walls which had been blackened by fire; over the altar now half-hidden by charred beams.

He directed the beam on to a little spiral iron staircase leading downwards into pitch darkness. "That's where I've hidden the loot . . . Be careful how you go . . . You'd better take my hand . . ."

"This joint gives me the creeps," she whispered.

He chuckled. "I chose this spot knowing very few people would want to nose around here."

He led her through the debris cluttering the aisle, and they descended the slippery iron staircase with care into what appeared to be a cellar. The rubble covering the centre of the floor had been cleared away to expose large flagstones. The beam of his torch came to rest on one of the flagstones which bore signs of having been recently moved.

He said: "It's all under there . . ."

"Pull it up and show me," she snapped impatiently.

"All in good time," he said with a laugh. "But first we must get one or two things straightened out between us . . ."

"What do you mean?"

His strong arms slipped around her waist. "Listen to me,

darling. I know I've not kept all the promises I've made you in the past, I—"

"I'll say you haven't!" she said, but made little effort to release herself from his embrace. "You've lied and lied, and—"

"But that's all finished and done with now, darling. We've made a big killing, and we can make a completely new start," he said soothingly, his right hand stroking her throat and hair; an action that rekindled the flame of her old desire for him. "Kiss me . . ."

"I don't think I should. You've—"

"Kiss me, darling, and forget everything else!"

She closed her eyes and obediently lifted her face. His lips found her eager mouth, but then her throat was seized in a terrible, vice-like grip. Momentarily she was in deep shock, but then she started to struggle. But her feeble struggles were futile and very quickly her eyes were bulging from their sockets, and black and red lights exploded within her terror-stricken brain as precious oxygen was shut off from it. . . .

\* \* \*

Detective Superintendent Ben Logan's nostrils twitched at the cloying, sickly smell of corruption underlying the strong disinfectant and he hurriedly lit up his battered briar. He gazed down on the shrunken corpse of the old man lying face upwards on the cold slab in the draughty mortuary in Wapping. The whole of the dead man's rib cage had been removed, and his lungs reposed in an enamelled kidney-shaped bowl on the bench.

Doctor Ian Menzies, the Pathologist, peeled off his red rubber gloves and tossed them on to the bench. He pointed a well-shaped forefinger at the bowl, and said: "There's no question of foul play . . . See those speckles on the lungs? He was in an advanced stage of T.B. but this was accelerated by a near-starvation diet . . . His death was premature and rather unnecessary—when one remembers that this is the era of the Welfare State . . ."

Logan grimaced. "Would it surprise you to know we found ten thousand five hundred pounds in fivers sewn into his

mattress? That he had no heating and no electric light? Not even a blanket to cover himself with. . . ? The old miser slept under newspapers!"

Adrian Potgieter, Menzies' tall South African assistant, grinned hugely. "A sort of paper sandwich with a biltong centre, man, eh?"

"I don't always appreciate your bizarre brand of humour, Adrian," said Menzies sourly.

"This bit of hem-stitching won't take me long," said the irrepressible Potgieter.

The telephone on the desk shrilled into life, and Logan answered its summons. "Yes, Logan speaking . . . What is it, Dusty. . . ? Yes, I know where it is. . . . Right, I'll join you there in about ten minutes," he said, and rang off.

"More trouble?" said Menzies, slipping into his overcoat.

Logan stroked his jowly chin. "I'm not sure . . . Some workmen are demolishing a blitzed church and have uncovered some bones in a cellar. Sergeant Miller wants me to take a look at 'em . . . It sounds more like a job for you than me . . . Would you come along to give your expert opinion?"

"That means missing another lunch," grumbled Menzies. "You—"

Two battered dumping-trucks and a police car were parked outside the red-bricked walls of the church that stood as a mute reminder of a megalomaniac's savage attempts to bomb the Anglo-Saxons into subjugation some twenty-nine years ago. Detective Sergeant Miller came out of the doorway as their car pulled into the kerb, and said: "Afternoon, sir . . . Afternoon, Doctor . . . I'm afraid there's not much to look at . . ."

They followed Miller into the wrecked church to find half a dozen workmen squatting around a small fire in the aisle. A middle-aged man with a drooping moustache rose to address Logan, "I 'ope we'll be allowed to get on with the job as soon as we've 'ad our brew-up, Guv," he said, gesturing to a smoke-blackened kettle suspended over the fire.

Logan raised his bushy eyebrows. "That's what I like about the good old British work man—keenness!"



The man with the drooping moustache looked a trifle sheepish. "We're on a bonus system, guv . . ."

"What's going to be built here?" said Logan as they picked their way down the cluttered aisle.

"The Ecclesiastical Commissioners decided not to re-build the church," explained Miller. "This used to be essentially a residential district, but since the war it's become a light industrial area . . . Mecca have bought the site and they're going to build a bingo hall here."

They clambered down a spiral iron staircase to find a young uniformed constable standing near a shallow hole which had been exposed by the removal of two large flagstones. In the shallow hole lay an incomplete skeleton with a few withered tissues adhering to it, and the skull had separated from the trunk.

"Potgieter usually takes notes for me," said Menzies. "Perhaps you'd be good enough to fill the gap, Dusty?"

Miller nodded, and Menzies bent over the human remains lying in the shallow hole. "These are purely preliminary remarks, of course. . . . This person has been dead for some twelve to eighteen months, and beyond doubt they are the remains of a female . . . The uterus is discernible . . . The skeleton is small, and it might be that of a girl or young woman . . ." his voice trailed away as he bent lower to his knees.

Menzies picked up the skull, and examined it carefully with the aid of a magnifying glass. "The skull has been neatly severed from the vertebrae, and the lower jaw is missing . . ."

"And that means?" prompted Logan.

"It means you've a job of work on your hands. This is no blitz victim," said Menzies straightening up, and gesturing to the huge pile of rubble nearby: "I suggest you put that lot through sieves. I'd have expected to find traces of material with the remains . . . plastic buttons, and metallic objects . . . It's important we find the lower jaw because we'll need to track down her dentist . . ."

Logan scowled at the rubble. "It'll take hours . . . Right. I'll fix it . . ."

Menzies turned to Miller. "There are a couple of sheets of brown paper and a ball of twine in the boot of my car. Would you fetch them for me, please . . ."

Ten minutes later, Menzies departed with a neatly tied parcel under his arm. The parcel contained the pathetic remains found under the cellar floor of the Church of Saint John.

Menzies went into the small, starkly functional laboratory to find his assistant, Adrian Potgieter, frowning at a worn tweed jacket on the bench.

"What have you got there, Adrian?" said Menzies.

"It's been sent along to us to test for bloodstains," said Potgieter. "I've tried McGrath's luminol reaction—but with no success . . ."

"The trouble with that method is that the intensity of the luminescence is so low and the areas are therefore ill-defined . . . Try with a Leucomalachite green reaction," said Menzies, laying the parcel on the bench.

Potgieter nodded. "By the way, I've set up the medium quartz spectograph for you on the table . . ."

Menzies removed the stolen jewellery from the safe and set to work. It was nearly five o'clock when he'd completed his delicate task with the spectograph. He replaced the jewellery in the safe, and then gazed at the brown paper parcel lying on the zinc-topped bench with a sense of pleasurable anticipation. Potgieter appeared from the store-room bearing two cups of tea.

"I'm getting quite a taste for the Englishman's inevitable cup of tea," said Potgieter. "I shall go on brewing it at home . . ."

"Are you looking forward to going back, Adrian?"

"In many ways, but I wish I was going back to Cape Town instead of Johannesburg . . . And I'll certainly miss swinging London," said Potgieter.

Menzies sipped his tea and looked at Potgieter. He'd miss this clever, easy-mannered young giant when he returned to his land of sunshine . . . Still, that wouldn't be for another two years yet . . .

"Now come and look at this," said Menzies, and spread a white dust sheet on the zinc-topped bench beside the parcel. "This'll interest you."

He opened the parcel, carefully removed the bones and skull, and placed them on the dust sheet. As he moved the bones and skull into their correct skeletal position he related the circumstances under which they'd been found. Then he added: "There doesn't appear to be a great deal to work on—but it's amazing how much corpses can tell one when subjected to modern methods of examination. . . . Now, the lower jaw's missing, and there's no scalp tissue adhering to the skull except this one very small particle at the back of the head. None of the facial tissue remains . . . The lower parts of the legs and arms are missing, and these have definitely been amputated—the extremities might have been chopped off but they've not been shattered . . . Finally, there are marks of burning on the skull, down the left side of the body and at the level of each knee. . . ."

Potgieter said slowly: "Whoever it was made determined efforts to destroy all clues to identity . . . Somebody must've had a grisly time carving up this one!"

"We'll begin by estimating her height," said Menzies. "To do this we'll employ Pearson's formulae, which is a mathematical formulae applied to one of the long bones of the body. The only long bone available in this case is the upper arm-bone—the humerus . . ."

"I know Pearson's formulae . . ."

"Right. Have a go at it while I clean away some of the dirt . . ."

Half an hour later Potgieter said doubtfully: "Something's wrong . . ."

Menzies checked Potgieter's calculations. "This factor's incorrect." Menzies scribbled rapidly. "Ah. She was between five feet and a half and five feet one inch tall . . ."

Menzies took a printed form issued by the Home Office and jotted down her height in the appropriate space. "Now we'll attempt to deduce her age by X-raying the various bone fusions or sutures . . ."

An X-ray of the palate suture confirmed that the woman had been between forty and forty-five years old at the time of her death. Then Menzies removed the tiny piece of scalp still adhering to the back of the skull, and examined it under the microscope." She had dark brown hair going grey," he said.

An examination of the uterus revealed that the dead woman had suffered from a fibroid growth. "A doctor might identify this condition," said Menzies. "He might even possess an X-ray plate for comparison . . ."

"So, now we're beginning to obtain a clear description of the victim," said Menzies with some satisfaction, and then saw Potgieter glance surreptitiously at his watch. Menzies grinned. "I know, Adrian—you've a date. Is it that pretty girl in Records? Margaret Allan?"

Potgieter reddened. "Yes, sir . . . How did you know?"

"I'm not blind. I've seen you looking at her with moonbeams in your eyes! Off you go, me lad . . . I'll earry on here for a



while longer. . . ."

As Potgieter shrugged into his overcoat, he said: "You put in an awful lot of overtime. Doesn't your wife ever complain?"

Menzies shook his head. "I'm a widower . . ."

"Oh—I'm sorry . . ."

"It happened a long time ago. One of the last doodle-bugs of the war fell on our house and killed my wife and only son," said Menzies, and then: "Off you go—you mustn't keep the young lady waiting . . ."

After Potgieter had gone Menzies stared broodingly into space, but he was soon dragged away from the bitter-sweet memories of the past by the arrival of Logan who was carrying a small canvas sack.

"We found a lower jaw and a few interesting things including a badly charred handbag in the rubble," said Logan. "Strewth! What a job . . ."

"It's nearly half-past seven. Will you join me with a sherry?"

Logan nodded and Menzies produced a bottle of Oloroso Seco and two glasses from the drawer of his desk. "I can give you a description of her . . ."

"You've been quick off the mark," said Logan, taking his sherry.

"She was between forty and forty-five. Between five feet and a half and five feet one inch tall, and she had dark brown hair going grey . . . And she suffered a fibroid growth in the uterus . . ."

Logan sipped his drink. "She's been dead for between twelve to eighteen months. Now we've something to work on . . . A pity you can't give us an equally good description of the murderer!"

"I can tell you one thing about him," said Menzies. "He had a certain knowledge of dissection . . . a crude basic knowledge . . . He might, for example, be a butcher. This is evident from the way he severed the skull from the trunk, and the manner in which he chopped off the arms and legs . . ."

Logan lit his pipe. "Now we'll have to sweat through the lists of London's missing women . . . That'll gobble up time . . ."

"You've access to a computer," observed Menzies. "Feed everything you have into it and you'll have the answer in quick time . . . providing she is a London woman. She might be one of thousands who commute daily to London . . . or she might have come up to London on a single shopping-spree . . ."

Logan yawned and stood up. "We'll have a crack at the London lists first . . . I'll start the ball rolling before I leave . . . Anything else to add?"

"An attempt was made to burn the remains with petrol . . ."

"I don't know what we'd do without you, Ian," said Logan with a warm smile, and strode out of the laboratory.

Menzies spread another dust cloth on the bench and emptied the contents of the canvas bag on to it. The lower jaw and the charred handbag had been wrapped in cotton wool, and he laid these to one side. Painstakingly, he separated the rest into groups; five plastic buttons of various sizes, two dust-covered metal suspender clips, a bone-handled clasp knife, and two fragments of striped material that were charred at the edges.

Menzies phoned down to the duty officer and ordered beef sandwiches and a cup of coffee. Then he carefully removed the cotton wool from the handbag, and peeled away the charred outer skin of the bag with tweezers. He found three two-shilling pieces, a shilling, and three pennies. Then, employing extreme delicacy, he picked out a small oblong of thickish cardboard and a folded slip of paper both of which were completely carbonized. Knowing that in the case of completely carbonized paper carbon is opaque to infra-red light and therefore results are negative, he decided to use the silver nitrate method. He immersed the carbonized documents in a five per cent solution of silver nitrate, and then returned to give his attention to the bone-handled knife.

He put on rubber gloves, opened the clasp knife and examined the big blade under a microscope. He spotted five hairs adhering to the blade and these matched the hairs of the dead woman. Then he dusted the blade and handle with black powder, and blew off the excess. He'd raised a clear thumb-print on the handle, and a smudged print on one side of the

blade.

He'd just finished enlarging the photographs of the fingerprints when a young constable brought his coffee and sandwiches. "Sorry I've been so long, sir . . . We've had a spot of bother in the charge-room with a drunk . . ."

"That's all right, Jones," said Menzies vaguely without looking up.

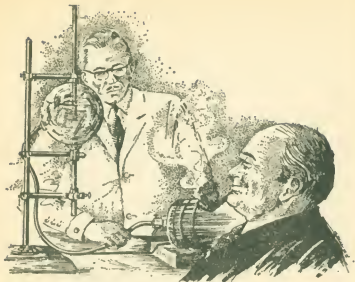
Utterly absorbed in his task, and with excitement now stirring within, Menzies quickly demolished the sandwiches and coffee before examining the lower jaw through his magnifying glass. Without doubt it belonged to the victim, and there were five fillings in the teeth that should be identifiable.

On one of the metal suspender clips he raised a fingerprint that matched the whorls of the smudged print on the knife blade.

He went over to the tank containing the carbonized documents soaking in the solution of silver nitrate and water. The products of combustion had reduced the silver nitrate and had deposited silver on the surface of the documents which had become silvery grey in colour. The amounts of deposit and its qualities had been affected by the residues from the printed material and this had caused the printing and writing to be legible as darker lines on a grey background. He photographed the treated documents under water because in this way the contrasts were stronger.

The small oblong proved to be a railway return ticket issued at Oxted in Surrey for London. The other exhibit was a paying-in slip issued by Barclays Bank, Oxted, showing that the sum of thirty-two pounds had been credited to the account of a certain Miss Doris Hyndley on November 3rd last year.

Menzies put through a telephone call to Logan at his home, gave him a concise report of his findings, and made a few suggestions. Then, weary to the very marrow of his being, he switched off the lights in the laboratory and took a taxi to his home; a small sparsely-furnished flat which seemed to reflect something of his great loneliness. He smiled wanly at the silver-framed photograph of his long-dead wife and son on the



mantelpiece, swallowed a pheno-barbitone tablet, and went to bed. . . .

Two days later Menzies came into the laboratory to find Logan waiting for him. Something very akin to awe was reflected in Logan's steady grey eyes when he said: "I take my hat off to you, Ian. You virtually solved ninety-eight per cent of this case right here in this laboratory . . ."

"You flatter me," said Menzies, smiling faintly. "But I presume you're here to tell me that Doris Hyndley's dentist has confirmed her identity from the fillings in the lower jaw?"

Logan nodded. "And everything else is beginning to fit together . . . Through her bank we've traced the issuer of that cheque for thirty-two pounds . . . He'd been making irregular payments to her for a long time . . . His name is Herbert Edgar Smethwick and he lives at 68 Balaclava Street in Pimlico—not far from the church . . . He's a butcher working for a big firm who own a number of branches. . . . The dead woman's sister has filled in a number of gaps for us . . ."

"Such as?"

"Doris Hyndley had an affair with Smethwick which ended when she gave birth to his child. She sued Smethwick and the Oxted magistrates made a paternity order against him . . . Doris Hyndley wasn't a good mother, and the sister is bringing up the child with her own . . . Doris Hyndley saw Smethwick from time to time when he came to explain why his payments were delayed . . . On two occasions the sister heard Doris Hyndley threaten to expose Smethwick for something he'd done . . . Last but not least, we've discovered that Smethwick was in deep financial troubles at the time of her death . . ."

"And I suppose you're bringing him in to 'assist your investigation' within the next day or two?" said Menzies.

"Would you like to be in at what may well be the kill? You've done so much . . ."

"I'd be very interested," said Menzies.

"Then come along to my office in half an hour. Let's hope your idea on how to clinch things comes off," said Logan.

Herbert Edgar Smethwick was a tall beefy man in his early fifties with coarse good looks that were marred by piggy blue eyes set close together. His roughened hand visibly shook as he picked up the tumbler of water and gulped the contents.

"That's right . . . I'm a butcher," he said. "But what's that got to do with her death? I keep telling you I know nothing about it . . ."

"We want you to assist us in our inquiries, Mister Smethwick," said Logan coldly as the plainclothesman discreetly removed Smethwick's tumbler and went out of the room. "You say you hadn't seen or spoken to Doris Hyndley for at least three months prior to her death?"

Beads of perspiration appeared on Smethwick's upper lip. "You're damned right I didn't see her," he blustered defiantly. "Are you trying to make out I'm a bloody murderer?"

"I haven't accused you of anything, sir . . . Now, can you give me an account of your movements on November the fourth last year?"

"Strewth! You're not asking much are you? What do you

think I am? The Memory Man?" said Smethwick with a sneer.

The plainclothesman came quietly into the room, stood behind Smethwick, and nodded emphatically at Logan. Logan closed the file in front of him and his face hardened as he gazed unblinkingly at Smethwick. "Can you explain how your fingerprints came to be on a bone-handled knife and on a metal suspender clip which were found near the remains of Doris Hyndley?"

The colour drained out of Smethwick's face and his chin sagged. His piggy eyes betrayed his shock at being trapped, and when he answered it was in a quavering whisper of defeat. She was always hounding me for money . . . She threatened to tell my boss I was flogging his meat from time to time. . . . I lost a lot of lolly on the horses . . . I—I was desperate, so I decided to knock her off. . . ." his eyes rolled and he slumped over the desk in a dead faint.

Logan nodded to the plainclothesman. "Get Jones to give you a hand with him. Take him downstairs and formally charge him, and see if you can get a signed statement out of him . . . And make sure he has facilities to engage a solicitor . . ."

When they'd gone Logan turned to Menzies. "Not a pretty sight when a murderer collapses like a house of cards, eh?"

Menzies sighed. "Murder is never pretty, but then we live in an odd society . . . Apart from his trial costs, the taxpayers will be burdened with the costs of keeping that oaf incarcerated in prison—presently running, I believe, at eight hundred and forty pounds per year . . ."

Logan puffed contentedly at his pipe and smiled. "Thanks to you, however, the costs of the investigation were kept to the bare minimum . . . Come on, Ian, I'm going to buy you a drink and a slap-up lunch . . . You've earned it, you laboratory detective!"



There's a cure for everything but stark  
dead.

*Scottish Proverb*

# CAB FINALE

D. C. MADELEY

*A chill of horror ran over him as he started down . . .*

**C**HARLES MELTON was decidedly drunk when he came away from Tillie Beamish's party. Crab-wise he made an unsteady descent of the front steps and stumbled into the roaring street, calling for a taxi. Then he must have passed out briefly, for he became suddenly though dimly aware that he was being bundled rudely and roughly into a cab.

Normally he would have remonstrated fiercely at being handled in such an uncouth manner. He was Charles Melton and as every one knew, not a man to be trifled with. His personage was a ware upon which he set great store and, although he rode rough-shod over any that stood in his way, he expected deference and respect from others. But tonight, mellowed by a belly-full of good whisky, he somehow felt unable to assert himself and only wanted to get home to the soft comfort of his bed.

As the taxi moved off between the tall familiar buildings, the swaying lights of the city hurt his eyes and so he closed them, slipping down along the seat to fall into a stupefied sleep.

Some time later, he had no idea how long, he awoke to find himself in total darkness. There was a foul taste in his mouth and his stomach churned with the aftermath of the night's revelry.

Where the devil was he? Dammit all, still in the taxi; he could feel it swaying, feel the leather seat beneath him. But surely he should have been home long ago. It must be hours since he left the party. Why was it so damnably dark? Where were the city lights? What the hell was going on? If this was some practical joke being played upon him by Tillie Beamish

and her pals then he'd show—. But no, they wouldn't dare; not to him.

Vaguely he remembered that he had not given any instruction to the driver and strangely enough could not recall being asked for any either. However, the man seemed to know what he was about, for they were travelling at an apparently terrific rate over what was obviously a rough uneven road. How on earth could the fellow see where he was going without lights?

Suddenly he was pierced by a little stab of fear. Of course; that was it. He was being kidnapped. There had been a lot of it going on lately, now it was his turn. The papers would have the headline tomorrow.

WELL KNOWN CITY FINANCIER ABDUCTED.  
FIVE HUNDRED THOUSAND DEMANDED  
FOR SAFE RETURN.

Good God! What could he do? Couldn't jump for it, they were moving too fast and besides he had no idea where they were in this damn pitch darkness.

Stone cold sober now, anger began to dispel some of his fear and he reached out to rap the dividing panel. But the driver either would not or could not hear. Again he thumped the partition without result. Dam the man. Dam them all. He would sit it out and wait until the cab stopped, then try to make a break for it.

On and on they sped, until at last he saw a faint orange glow in the black sky ahead. Ah! dawn was breaking. Soon it would be light. On and on, nearer and nearer came the glow; but it was not the dawn. A great fire was raging somewhere in the distance, fangs of flame leaping high into the velvet night. And they were heading straight towards it.

Now the taxi began to slow until they were only just crawling along. As if by magic the enveloping darkness lifted to be replaced by an intense white light and the bewildered Charles saw that they were creeping through an archway set in a towering wall. When they finally stopped a heavy iron gate



clanged shut behind them. Taking the opportunity Charles wrenched open the door and leapt out to stand staring wildly around him, blinking in the brilliant light.

They were in a sort of cobbled court-yard surrounded by an unscalable wall of shining marble. Across the cobbles an evil faced little dwarf was hurrying towards them, carrying in one hand a thin black cane. The cab driver took a printed form from his pocket and went to meet him. Accepting the form the dwarf scanned it, nodded and approached the bewildered Charles.

"Charles Melton, of fifty-two Beaumaris Court?"

"Yes, but look here I—"

With a lightning movement the dwarf shot out his hand to grasp Charles by the chin, twisting his head sideways.

"Ah! a scar under the left ear. Have to make sure we've got the right one you know." He scrawled a signature at the bottom of the form and handed it back to the driver.

"What's going on?" demanded Charles. "Where am I?"

"This," replied the dwarf. "Is known as the department of retribution. Now come with me."

"I certainly shall not come with you, and I suggest you tell that cabbie fellow to take me home immediately." Charles looked round, but the cab and its driver had both disappeared.

With a thin cruel smile the dwarf lifted his cane to give Charles a poke in the ribs. It was only a gentle prod but his body was suddenly racked by excruciating pain. Not ordinary physical pain but something quite indescribable that tore at his nerve ends and agonised his brain. When finally it passed he stood trembling with cold sweat standing on his forehead.

"I am afraid that will happen each time you disobey my order," said the dwarf. "Now come with me."

Rather than suffer that terrible pain again Charles fell in beside the horrible little man. "What is that great blaze over there?" he asked.

"That is the eternal fire?" chuckled the dwarf. "The place where all my failures finish up. Now stop here."

As they came to a halt Charles recoiled in horror at the sight

of half a dozen coffins lined up against the base of the wall. The dwarf led him up to one of them and flung back the lid. It contained the body of a young man only recently dead.

"Recognise him?"

Charles nodded weakly. "Yes, it's Jimmy Latham. He shot himself only last week."

"Ruined by you," announced the dwarf vindictively. "He was forced to commit suicide." With a wave of his cane he went on. "Any of the others familiar to you?"

"I believe," whispered Charles. "That one there is my mother's."

"You're right, it is. They say she died of a broken heart because of your wickedness. But now to work. There is a task you must perform to my satisfaction if you are ever to go from here and escape the eternal fire. Come."

He led the way to the first coffin in the line. "Open it."

Not wanting to, but afraid of what a refusal would bring, Charles bent and lifted the lid. A chill of horror ran over him as he stared down at the decaying, but still recognisable face of his late wife. Sick and afraid he looked appealingly at the dwarf. "What must I do?"

"On the other side of the yard you will find a pile of granite head-stones. Select one and bring it back here."

Struggling and sweating, his hands torn by the rough edge of the stone, Charles finally managed to get one over his shoulders. With a breaking back he staggered across the cobbles and dropped it down beside the open coffin. The dwarf handed him a masons mallet and chisel.

"Your task," he said. "Is to carve a suitable inscription to each of the persons in the coffins; beginning with your wife."

"But I can't," protested Charles. "I've never done any thing like that in my life."

"You will learn in time; and time is one commodity you have plenty of now." The dwarf menaced with his cane.

With a groan Charles fell to his knees and started chipping away at the tough stone. After what seemed an interminable time a crude M was formed in the granite. The dwarf cocked

an eye to survey the work, shook his head and reached out to touch the stone with his cane. It immediately disintegrated into a pile of dust.

"Not good enough. You must fetch another slab and try again."

Time and time again the dwarf rejected his work. Time and time again Charles dragged the heavy head-stones across the courtyard. Days passed. Months. Years. Huge blisters covered his tired hands, his back ached and his brain was numbed. And then at last, neat precise lettering began to form beneath his careful chiselling.

MARY MELTON  
BELOVED WIFE OF CHARLES  
BORN 1936 DIED . . .

"Died what," the dwarf enquired.

Charles looked up blankly. "Nineteen seventy."

"Not when. Why," roared the dwarf reaching out with his cane.

"All right. All right. I'll do it," Charles screamed. He looked into the coffin at his dead wife's face and as he looked the left side of her nose fell away. With a pitiful moan he went back to his work on the head-stone.

BORN 1936 DIED OF POISON  
ADMINISTERED BY THE HAND  
OF HER HUSBAND.

"Good. Very good," laughed the dwarf. "I will pass that. Now we can move on to the next one."

Back at the party Tillie Beamish rushed in upon her happy guests. "Listen boys and girls," she gushed. "You'll never guess what's happened. Old Charlie Melton has just been knocked down by a taxi. Killed stone dead; right outside my own front door."

# MALLARME THE AXEMAN

LOUIS ALLEGRI

*Seven days grace, that was all he wanted . . .*

*Illustrated by Vera Jarman*

“**W**ELL, YOU asked if I had any last request and that’s it! Or were they merely empty words?” Gruhn stretched his long frame on the lice-infested bunk in the corner of the dank cell.

“But such a request—Chief Inspector?” the minion still hesitated to omit his old title. “It—it’s unusual . . . strange?”

“It’s strange, it’s strange.” he mimicked the officer under his breath. Strange that they should even listen to someone awaiting torture and execution for treason and corruption.

But then he had learned, over the years, how to use the weaknesses of his opponents whose judgements were so often clouded by emotions and fears.

“You did say any request, within reason, would be granted,” he glared disdainfully at the officer. “Are you going to refuse a dying man’s whim? I want to see Mallarme, my executioner . . .”

They would grant his request all right, he grinned at the retreating back of the officer. The irrational Monarchists must have their little rituals before death. Perhaps it gave them some relief from the guilt they felt.

Guilt! Fortunately, he had never been plagued by such nonsense.

Seven days grace, that was all he wanted; by then the coup would have taken place. His future masters paid lip service to

many principles but held none. They were far more dangerous than the present regime, but the opportunities for someone like himself were—he choked back his excitement—almost unlimited.

He cursed and hurled his cup at the voracious-looking rat staring up at him from the straw-covered floor. He was sure his scheme would save him—but it was no joke being within axe-swinging distance of Mallarme, the public executioner.

He angrily shrugged away the hint of terror. Superstition. The monster was useful to frighten peasants and the credulous, and he had never been frightened of anyone in his existence of fifty-two years . . .

“You wished to see Mallarme . . . ?”

“By God,” he hissed, and sat stiffly on the edge of his bunk, later that day. He had met the tall, saturnine visitor in the past, and his presence had always disturbed him.

His cheeks were sunken above a lantern jaw. But his eyes were the worst; like those of a blind man. Glazed windows of the soul.

“Ah, the notorious Mallarme,” he smiled and got to his feet.

“The authorities have agreed to your most unusual last request, Chief Inspector,” the visitor said softly, “and I bow to their wishes, although, I would prefer it to have been otherwise.”

Gruhn studied the man who held the key to his release. Mallarme’s true identity was known only to himself and a few others. He had studied all the details available about him. Those glazed eyes veiled a bubbling inferno of guilt. Oh yes. He was a good judge of men.

“Are you ashamed of meeting your victim?” Gruhn sneered.

Mallarme shook his head, “I feel neither sorrow or pleasure, but merely carry out what the Law decrees,” his steady voice eked some confidence from Gruhn.

“What you are telling me is that the Law is your conscience?” Gruhn smiled as Mallarme hesitated and then nodded.

“If you weren’t to believe that you couldn’t live with your-



self, hey Mallarme? To show preference for one victim over another would make your grisly occupation evil . . . ?”

“You—understand me, Gruhn.”

“But it’s all a pretence! Your daughter, she is all you have, isn’t she . . . ? Suppose the mighty Law decreed she was to die, could you then—?”

“My—daughter?”

“Yes, Mallarme. Would you do your duty then? Would you . . . ? If not, would you not then feel the blood of so many on those large hands of yours . . . ?

“Answer, Mallarme! You have a duty to a dying man to answer. One of your victims . . .”

"I—I hope I would . . . do my duty," there was a slight tremor in his voice and Gruhn felt exalted at his own power.

"Liar!" Gruhn shouted. "You could never harm your so charming, innocent daughter, Alexa . . .

"Oh, I know everything there is to know about you, Executioner. Alexa is all you've ever had to love. Your father was as stark and unfeeling as the block, and your wife—well, the less said about her the better."

He smiled as Mallarme clenched his huge hands. "After your wife died you devoted what spark of love that managed to seep through those glazed eyes of yours all on Alexa, who believes you're a government clerk . . .

"Why haven't you told her the truth, Mallarme, if you're not ashamed and the Law is your sole conscience? Alexa is a very intelligent and sensitive girl nearing twenty, and if what you do is not disgusting and evil, she would surely understand," Gruhn smiled contemptuously.

"The—Law cannot be evil."

"Listen to me, Mallarme. If I am executed, your daughter will immediately be told the truth about you . . .

"But this need not happen . . . I want my execution postponed for seven days. Become sick or something. Our masters are great ones for the formalities, and by the time another experienced executioner, worthy of his victim is brought into the province, I shall be safe."

Mallarme's frozen eyes stared into space for a long time. Such a forbidding creature deserved the grave for a bed, Gruhn felt his flesh crawl.

And then he was left alone, drained of energy after his efforts, but content. Even a little smug. Mallarme would torture himself for a while, but would then realise that he dare not use the axe on this occasion.

Mallarme did not return until the evening of the execution. With only one hour left, Gruhn tried to contain his angry fears. "You left it late enough! Well . . . ?"

"You are quite right, Gruhn. My impartiality was a pretence

... I see clearly now it was with an evil bitterness that I wielded the axe."

"Good!" Gruhn laughed with relief. "So you can't hide the truth any longer." He touched the side of his nose and winked, "Well, now your daughter need never know of your disgusting past, if I have my few days grace?"

"Her eyes . . . I felt unclean."

"Lovely eyes, I'll grant you that," Gruhn frowned impatiently.

"I had called on the Law as my God. A device! I knew that as soon as I saw the innocence leave my daughter's eyes and looked into the pit that was my soul."

"You . . . told Alexa?" Gruhn paled—but then his sharp mind reacted swiftly, "Well, Mallarme, if you can't forgive yourself then turn to religion; that's always a handy last resort. There's a monastery I can recommend—"

"No! That isn't possible now."

"Oh? Well, you can't kill again," Gruhn shrugged and waved him away contemptuously.

"Just once more, Chief Inspector, even at the cost of eternal damnation!" his eyes were like fire and Gruhn stepped back, shivering violently.

"But . . . ? And what of Alexa . . . ?"

"My—poor Alexa killed herself this morning . . . I shall take great pleasure in my last execution, Gruhn. It will be slow—and very personal. I'll see you soon," he smiled.





# THINGS ONLY GROW IN THE SUNSHINE

MALCOLM R. WOOD

*Inside this quiet, bright cosy room something moved  
or was it a trick . . .*

**P**OLICEWOMAN Harrison brought him in. Soft, warm and tiny he lay snuggled in the battered cardboard box amongst wedges of cottonwool and tissue paper like a piece of fine Meissen, intricate, detailed, delicate.

"What you got there then?" asked the fat impassive hulk of the desk sergeant, disinterestedly stirring a cup of brown mud which oft passed for tea in the sultry London police station.

"Abandoned baby, Sarge. At St. Pancras station. I got him from the stationmaster's office."

"How did he get there?"

"A lady found him on one of the seats, so the stationmaster said."

"I suppose the woman who found him had vanished without leaving her name."

"Yes Sarge . . . the stationmaster didn't think . . ."

"Take him to the WPC's office, I'll phone the welfare people."

"Right Sarge."

The innocent baby slept on unaware of all that went on around him. The WPC's room was warm and policewoman Harrison placed the box near the window, just out of reach of the sun which sent a ray of burnished bronze angling through.

Policewoman Harrison left to get a cup of tea.

Inside the quiet, bright, cosy room something moved or was

it a trick of the sunlight playing with the shadows or perhaps an eddy of dust flicked by a draught?

At the welfare home for children Mrs. Evans put down the receiver and called out,

"Dorothy, would you come in here a moment."

Dorothy went in, dry, thin, fifty and a spinster, devoted to her work in the welfare home and giving all her body and mind could as assistant to Mrs. Evans, the Principal.

"Ah there you are. Would you drive over to Paddington West police station, there's an abandoned child about three weeks old. Bring him back here there's a dear."

"Yes Mrs. Evans, I'll go at once."

Out went Miss Dorothy Spinks to the back yard of the City cramped welfare home where she parked her well cared for Morris 1000.

Twenty minutes later she arrived at the police station and parked her car on the double yellow line right outside the main entrance. A policeman strolling out on to the beat only smiled at her and passed on his way. Everyone knew and liked Miss Spinks and she often helped out at police dances.

"Hallo Dorothy," welcomed fat sergeant, "Nice to see you again. Still living in the same place?"

"Oh yes sergeant," she replied, bravely, thinking of her blank, cramped bedsit on the other side of Paddington, "I do like it there ever so much."

"Mmmm. Well you take good care of yourself. The baby's in the WPC's office."

"Thank you sergeant."

Going in, she at first could not see the baby because of the bright sun but then her eyes became accustomed to the glare and she saw the box standing in the middle of a ray of the sunlight.

"Oh, some people have no idea leaving the little mite in the sun," she said to herself, reaching for the box.

"Oh what a little angel, so pretty," she said, this time to the baby as she ran her fingers through the flaxen curls which were already covering most of his head.

"I must get you back at once and get you bathed, goodness knows how long you've been in this box."

The small blossom eyelids perhaps flickered, showing understanding at finding a friend. She noticed how the baby's rose-blessed face kept following hers, by sense, for he did not open his eyes.

Miss Spinks opened the door and went back outside to where she found WPC Harrison talking to the sergeant.

"I'll be going now then," ventured Miss Spinks.

"Let me say goodbye to the little beauty," stated the policewoman bending to look into the cardboard box.

"Why I'm sure he didn't have so much hair when I left him in the office."

Miss Spinks ruffled a little and by a mini-octave, raised her voice, "So it was you who left him directly in the sun eh?"

"Why no, I made a point of placing him away from it."

All three remained silent for a moment staring at the cuddly shape snuggled deep, but nothing was said.

"Yes, he has certainly got a lot of hair," stated Policewoman Harrison running her own young sensitive fingers through his curls. Was it a momentary expression of surprise that crossed her face for an instant as her fingers still travelled in the baby's hair?

Outside in the street her car was causing an unnecessary traffic jam.

Opening the rear nearside door she placed the box on the seat and wedged her travelling rug around it to ensure that an accident would not send it tumbling.

Presently she was back in Mrs. Evans' office showing her the new arrival.

"Isn't he delightful?" offered Miss Spinks.

"Humph, they're all the same to me, all the same."

Miss Spink tried to swallow her dislike of the woman, but it was difficult. How Mrs. Evans had ever got the job as Principal after old Mrs. Barclay died she never knew. Arriving five years ago she had completely upset Miss Spinks by taking the vacant position after a hasty meeting by the Board of Gov-

ernors. Something, she gathered, to do with her tendency to get over involved with the children. Over involved with discipline yes, with love as did Miss Spinks. No. Surely, she had reasoned to herself, love was what mattered. If one had love for the children under one's care everything else would follow naturally or so she had supposed.

However, when Mrs. Evans had taken the job from under her nose she swore to herself that she would not let it affect her work so she had carried on keeping all her criticisms of the Principal secretly to herself. Only now and again did any feelings of remorse come over her and those, only when she was with Mrs. Evans and in actual contact with the children at the same.

"I'll take him away now then," remarked Miss Spinks, picking up the box. But Mrs. Evans was already deep in a pile of paperwork and probably would not have noticed if Miss Spinks had jumped clean through the window.

Down the long corridor she went to the bathroom where she did not in the least surprise the duty nurse by saying she would wash and change the baby herself. Running the water in, she was about to pick the baby up when she distinctly heard somebody say "thank you" but when she turned to see who had spoken there was nobody in the bathroom except herself and the now awake, blue eyed baby.

"Strange," she murmured to herself but thought no more about it and busied herself with the baby.

Soon she was rubbing in the last of the baby powder into the soft pliable skin and thinking to herself if there was any milk ready in the kitchen with which to feed the child. She had taken the baby into the nursery, laid it into the cot and was at the door about to go down to the kitchen when she again heard the words "thank you" coming from behind her and so certain was she this time that she said, "Nurse, stop playing about."

And when she saw no one there but the baby she promised herself an even earlier night than usual as well as a couple of sleeping pills.

The baby reluctantly drank the warm milk and presently returned to the world of dreams from which it had been roused for quite long enough.

Miss Spinks went to the humble canteen which served the plainest of foods and partook of tea and toasted scones, as she did every day, before taking leave of everyone and driving home.

That evening two of her friends from the Women's Institute came round to play Lexicon and drink tea and talk about little else save the weather and tomorrow's weather, and the weather for their joint week at Scarborough.

However she did surprise her friends by announcing that she felt peaky and wanted to give herself an early night so amidst condolences and the offer of a phone call the next day, to make sure she was well, they left.

Wondering if she should phone a doctor or not she fidgeted around the room, tidying up bits and pieces which were already immaculately laid out, before deciding against it. In the bedroom she took three pills, something she had never done before and within seconds she was deep in slumber.

Her dream was one of those which made an impression deep on the mind, so much so that the first thing she did when she awoke the next morning was think about it.

It had begun, it seemed, immediately she had closed her eyes. The baby boy had come crawling into the room, climbed up the coverlet and squatted beside her on the pillow.

"Thank you," he had said.

"Why?" she had replied thinking it quite natural that the conversation should be taking place.

"I am sent to reward."

"Who by and why?"

"Who does not matter and Why? Because you are devoted. It is my duty to grant you a wish, anything from the slightest frivolity to the deepest secret."

Then she remembered that it had taken no long drawn out decision, no flicking from lists of diamond tiaras to villas in Monte, none of those things. She had wanted and had always

wanted one thing. It gave her no difficulty to say it.

"I would like to be the principal at the home," her voice had come, steady and direct and it had all seemed so natural, so correct.

She remembered how the babe had smiled, its pink cheeks happy and mischievous. Then he had climbed down from her coverlet and out through the half opened door.

Yes, it had been a strange dream, but, she reflected, the golden haired little boy had made a deep impression on her. He was one of those children who reminded her of the marriage which she had turned down, a long time ago, so she could look after the far bigger family at the home.

From down below in the hall came the ring of the phone, one of her friends from last night making the promised call. Getting from the bed she started at the time, it was half past eight and she was supposed to begin work at eight. Rushing downstairs she lifted the receiver.

"Hallo . . . Yes, this is Miss Spinks . . . Oh it's you nurse . . . Yes I know it's late . . . I'll come over at once . . . What do you mean, you can't tell me over the phone . . . All right half an hour."

If Miss Spinks knew how to curse she would have done so, being so late but instead she calmly got dressed and wondered what it was that the nurse could not tell her over the phone.

Arriving at the home she saw a number of police cars and an ambulance outside. Rushing in she confronted the first person she bumped into, policewoman Harrison, and asked what was the matter.

"Oh Dorothy it's awful . . . poor Mrs. Evans."

"Why, what's happened to her . . ." but already she was stepping to where other uniforms clustered and barging into . . . the nursery.

Inside two ambulance men were pulling a body on to a stretcher. A body ripped and torn. Lacerated as if by a wire two-pronged roasting fork and everywhere was red as if all had been sprayed with an aerosol of blood.

Automatically Miss Spink's eyes strayed to the empty cot.

Now policewoman Harrison was beside her.

"You shouldn't have come in . . . C'mon let's go and get some fresh air."

Outside the policewoman asked, "Where is that baby . . . Don't you always put new arrivals in that nursery?"

"I suppose the killer must have taken him," she replied, distantly with no idea of where she got that answer from.

They walked for the half mile which ended at Miss Spinks's then went in. Going up the stairs policewoman Harrison paused to stoop and pick up something from the worn carpet.

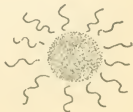
"Look at this."

Miss Spinks took it—a baby's bootie—and felt ill.

Policewoman Harrison put her to bed and gave her a sedative.

Policewoman Harrison returned to the scene of the crime, reflecting that at last, even if it were only temporary, Dorothy must get the job as principal and about time too she was so devoted.

Back in the police station, later, she overheard her sergeant describe the killing as devilish and it sent her scalp tingling because it reminded her of the day before when, just before Miss Spinks took the tot away, she had ruffled his hair. Underneath, just above the ears, she had felt two little pointed, hard lumps like tiny horns. They had been spaced as wide apart as the prongs of a toasting fork. Surely not.



*Who could connect a centenary celebration in a remote Yorkshire moorland town with high gangsterdom in New York?*

*Toni, with a little help from her old, disreputable friend, Unkerleddy of Rotherhithe, does precisely this. Unkerleddy's co-operation costs her two hundred 'nicker' for two names – 'Orrery' and 'New York'.*

*It puts her on the track of a stolen Paul Klee.*

*Further help from a New York gangster acquaintance, whose devotion to Toni's Prussian blue eyes, transcends a humiliating and expensive experience at Toni's hands, lands her in conflict with 'hoodlums' and 'big bosses' in New York.*

*By her courage, coolness, effrontery, and quick-wittedness she disconcerts the one and bluffs the other and returns the Paul Klee to its rightful owner.*

## TONI RESCUES A PAUL KLEE

DERWENT VALE

*Illustrated by Vera Jarman*

"DON'T KNOW," replied Toni to Timothy's question. She stared across the long undulating moorlands, noting the sombre colours, the high, bright sky with its great clouds like archangel wings and the air shimmering above heath and bracken.

"Wuthering Heights. Timothy—sad and lonely and beautiful, but not for me!" She was decisive. "I like people and movement—and Rotherhithe. No, I wouldn't change for this, lovely as it is."

Timothy laughed.



"I wonder if that's the true reason, Toni. What if there were a Heathcliffe about?"

"What an idea, Timothy!" But she thought a villainous Heathcliffe might cause her to amend her opinion somewhat. "Oh, but this is nonsense. I love these wild moors. I love the old grey houses."

"Glad you came, Toni? I was not being selfish in asking you to come?"

"Not a bit," she assured him. "I'm proud that you were asked to exhibit in the centenary festival."

"To think there's a Picasso and a Paul Klee in the show. Oh only on loan, from Twistleton Manor, I realize. And it's not really an important exhibition. Just a small Yorkshire town celebrating a thousand years of history."

"Paul Klee—Picasso—You're in good company, Timothy."

"Blue period too!" said Timothy with exquisite gratification. "I say, Toni, let's go down and have another look."

"At the Picasso or the Timothy Blake?" Toni bantered.

"Both," laughed Timothy as they set off on the descent, through heather and bracken, skirting monolithic boulders of grey millstone grit, through coppices of silver birch and pine until at last they came to the moor road into the little northern town of Twistleton, a solid, grey stone town, liberally bespattered with lichen stone roofs and tall chestnuts and decked overall with flags like a battleship in a regatta. There were floral decorations and bunting too—gestures to commemorate some stubborn defiance of authority in the past—the Norman tyranny, King Henry VIII, Prince Rupert of the Rhine and his wild horsemen, the makers of the Industrial Revolution and so on.

Tradition had it that a thousand years ago a Saxon free-booter had built a stockade by the river and with naive grandiosity had called it Twistles' Town after himself. And now the bunting and the dancing and the roundabouts were in commemoration of the event. A little touch of the aesthetic was provided by an exhibition of modern art, mainly because the local lord of the manor, Sir Thomas Twistleton, had

suggested it. He collected modern paintings and he owned the Picasso and the Paul Klee, which formed the focal point of the exhibition. He had seen Timothy's work in Paris along with that of other young artists of the day and he had invited them to exhibit at the festival.

When Toni and Timothy reached the market square they found a buzzing, speculative little crowd assembled on the town hall steps, staring interrogatively at a portentous policeman, whose helmet stood out above a mixture of cloth caps, headscarves and somewhat antique bowlers.

"Hey Tom Birks," called a cloth-cap with northern belligerency, "can't tha say some'at?"

"None o' your lip, Jim 'Ardisty," growled the law. "You'll read abaht it int' Gazette on Friday."

"Picture's been stole," said an informative bowler. "Plain clothes chap telled 'is pal. 'Eard it plain with me own ears."

"Not mine, I'll bet!" Timothy exclaimed.

Later they discovered the Paul Klee had been stolen during the lunch hour when the exhibition hall had been empty and only an aged caretaker had been left on duty as custodian, drowsily contemplating nothing, in a chair in the lobby.

"I have a picture in the exhibition," said Timothy approaching the policeman.

"Then they'll be wanting to see you, lad," said the policeman. "They want to see all exhibitors. Better go in."

"This is my sister," said Timothy.

"Well, I dunno." He looked at Toni, and liking what he saw, conceded the point. "I daresay they'll chuck you out if they don't think you'll be any use to 'em."

He laughed at his own drollery and let them into the lobby. Toni noted police everywhere; indeed, an over abundance of them. The Klee must be extremely valuable.

Whilst Timothy was being questioned she glanced around the exhibition, recapturing earlier impressions. She saw an empty frame where the Klee had been and recalled its glowing colours and a dreamlike quality about it. The Picasso—ethereally blue and depicting a scene in Spain—a painting

by a young American near where the Klee had been—a strange picture of a peasant in a green smock and a girl floating in the air—a mass of fruits and vegetables in the sky and a strangely distorted sun—snowflakes in a corner—rain on a distant plough, from a black cloud. It was like a dream fantasy.

What had the Klee portrayed? Surely a landscape, but like a fairy tale beginning, 'Once upon a time there were three yellow birds, which lived in a tree made of fish scales and whalebone and one day they flew away and dived deep into a sea full of red and blue coral—'

Something was wrong with one of the pictures. Now which was it?

"Shocking thing, Miss Blake!" a voice broke into her reverie.

"Sir Thomas! You startled me! Oh yes, indeed! I'm so sorry. It's your picture is it not?"

"It is! In daylight too! Very cleverly done. As far as we know, nobody has left the building with anything like a rolled-up canvas. There have been plain clothes men in the corridors and uniformed men outside all day."

"Could the picture be still in the building?" Toni suggested.

"We thought of that. The place is being searched."

"And suspects?"

"Everybody is suspect, my dear," said Sir Thomas, giving Toni a whimsical smile. Toni grimaced.

"Won't the Paul Klee be difficult to get rid of?" she asked. "It is surely very well-known."

"Oh yes, indeed! I quite expect there will be a ransom asked for it. Like the Goya Wellington from the National Gallery, you know. It couldn't be sold if that's what you mean."

But days passed and no message of any sort was received from the thieves by Sir Thomas, nor did a search of the town hall reveal anything. The police interrogated all the exhibitors and investigated all their backgrounds. Not one turned out to be an international art thief or for that matter anything more than what he was—an artist.

Eventually the exhibitors were allowed to remove their pictures and leave the town. Timothy returned to Paris, Toni to London and although she lost no sleep over the missing Paul Klee she had an insistent little nagging at the back of her mind that at sometime she had noticed an incongruity at the exhibition, which might have been a clue to the whereabouts of the stolen picture.

What was it? Some fleeting impression, suddenly swept away by an intrusion of some other matter. Of course? Sir Thomas Twistleton's unexpected approach! What was she thinking of at that moment? The Picasso? The fairy tale she was inventing for the Paul Klee? In exasperation she gave it up. In any case she was not likely to be involved further in the case.

And she was wrong.

She became totally involved, because of a chance encounter with Sir Thomas Twistleton in the Hilton cocktail bar some days after her return to London.

She was there at Michael's invitation and whilst she was sipping a dry Martini and Michael was saying extravagant things about her Hardy Amies dress of pale blue Japanese silk, her Prussian blue eyes and the string of exquisitely matched pearls she had inherited from an aunt quite recently, a voice at her side murmured, "Why Miss Blake I didn't know you were a friend of Michael!"

"Oh hello, sir!" said Michael.

"Sir Thomas!" exclaimed Toni. "How nice to see you again."

"Under more pleasant circumstances," said Sir Thomas.

"The Paul Klee," Toni explained, noting Michael's questioning glance.

"Of course," said Michael. "Young Timothy was exhibiting, now I recall. A very odd affair and one of a similar number of art thefts, over the past year or so."

"Why particularly odd?" asked Sir Thomas.

"Why, none of the stolen pictures could ever be sold. Too well-known. Like stealing the Mona Lisa."

"Somebody once did!" Toni murmured.

"Agreed," said Michael. "A crank who had fallen in love with a face on a canvas."

"And these thefts of well-known modern paintings?" asked Sir Thomas.

"Some crank again, no doubt. We think possibly some big shot in the international art thieving racket with a collecting mania."

"We? Ah yes, of course! You are in some branch of the Civil Service connected with international crime are you not, Michael? Your father once mentioned it to me."

"Oh we have connections in Interpol," said Michael cautiously, and because Sir Thomas's remark had rather disconcerted him, he in turn forgot to be discreet and turning to Toni said jestingly, "How is it Toni, you didn't track down the picture? Weren't you up there with Timothy?"

For a moment there was a slight embarrassment amongst them as Michael realized his indiscretion, and two little crinkles of surprise appeared between Toni's eyes.

Sir Thomas looked at Toni with a new interest.

"Really? Are you in Michael's line of business, Miss Blake?"

"Not at all, Sir Thomas. I am interested in Michael's exploits, that is all."

"The insurance company would pay handsomely for the return of the Klee," said the older man blandly, and feeling he had said sufficient within the bounds of propriety added, "However, that is neither here nor there. Would you both care to join us—my wife will be along shortly—at dinner: that is, of course, if you have no other plans?"

"Thank you," said Toni, "Michael, I think we might."

"Why yes, indeed. Very many thanks, sir," Michael conceded graciously, but he gave Toni a quick and surreptitious look of reproach.

"Serves you right!" whispered Toni as they followed Sir Thomas to the dining room. "You realize, of course, I am going after the Klee?"

"Oh lor' Toni, do forgive me," muttered Michael miserably.

"I really made a bloomer, didn't I?" but seeing the glitter of excitement in Toni's face he suddenly grinned: "Oh you fraud, Toni!"

"I've just remembered something, Michael. It could be a clue."

"*What* for heaven's sake, Toni?" he whispered, smiling hypocritically at the same time at Sir Thomas, who had turned to make some polite comment.

"A banana!" murmured Toni behind Michael's back.

"A ban— Ah yes indeed, Sir Thomas," and accusingly to Toni as other diners interposed between them, "Toni, you're fooling!"



"Not really. Silly as it sounds, I'll find the Klee when I find the banana, I am referring to."

With that absurdly cryptic promise, Michael had to be content for Toni refused to enlarge on it, either then or later.

Next day she called on Unkerleddy, whose knowledge of London's underworld was very comprehensive—not surprisingly so, since he had contrived a profitable little corner in the specialized tools it used in its nefarious purposes.

"Me Unkerleddy knows all that's goin' on," Robert, Toni's favourite Judo pupil maintained. "Stands ter reason donit? 'E supplies the wotcher-mecallums for any job wot's goin'."

Unkerleddy rubbed his King Edward potato nose, screwed up his shrewd little blue eyes and gave Toni his verdict: "It'll cost an 'undred nicker, Miss, for a name. An' another for a plice. An' that'll be yer lot."

"Two hundred pounds for a name and a place, Unkerleddy!" exclaimed Toni indignantly. "Why it's robbery!"

"Ain't it all?" grinned Unkerleddy with conscious humour.

"What will you get out of it, Unkerleddy?"

"Me? Why I gets me cut and if yer talks and it gets around, Miss, I gets carved up, don' I?"

"I won't talk, Unkerleddy."

"I know that, Miss. But business is business, ain't it? Come rahnd Sat'd'y arahnd closing time and maybe I'll 'ave something for yer. A ton now, Miss, if yer can manage it, and another ton when I passes over the goods."

On the following Saturday evening when the singing and the shouting from the Angel had died away in the Rotherhithe alleys, and the last 'bovver' boy on his big Norton had roared down the cobbles of the Bermondsey Wall, Toni made her way to Unkerleddy's flat.

"Them pictures, Miss," began Unkerleddy, redolent of hops and barley and other splendidly transmuted fruits of the countryside. "Well it's big an' nobody talks. So I goes up to Wandsworth to see an old pal in the nick, like wot's doin' a stretch for moving a few objeys dart. I put it straight to this bloke, see. I sez, 'Pictures, Larry! Pictures wot nobody can

flog, 'cos they're too well known'. 'I gets yer, Eddie', 'e sez. 'Nah, I know nofing this end, see'. Which means 'e knows plenty, but 'e ain't sayin'. Then I sez, 'Wot abaht the other end?' Me not 'aving a clue wot 'e's yammerin' abaht. Then 'e sez, 'Orrery for an 'undred nicker'. 'E spells it out slow like—O-R-R-E-R-Y—An' then 'e says, 'New York'. "And bang goes yer lolly, Miss."

"A lot of money for so little information, Unkerleddy!" said Toni sadly.

"If yer asks me, Miss, it ain't bad goin', with a screw breathin' dahn yer neck and Larry been doin' 'is lot these past coupla years."

"But, Unkerleddy! How does your friend get his information, if he's been in prison for two years?"

"Don't meanto say 'e's outer business, Miss. Business as usual wiv Larry and 'is lot. That's the way it is."

Later from her Rotherhithe cottage Toni put in a trans-Atlantic 'phone call to one of New York's most fashionable night clubs.

"Mr. Charles Bellatti, please," she requested when her call was answered.

"Who is this?" a pleasant voice inquired.

"Tell Mr. Bellatti it's his London Irish calling him urgently, please."

Two minutes later, a strongly masculine voice bawled down several thousand miles of Atlantic cable, "Irish! You've decided to marry me! I forgive everything! Come home to poppa, sweetheart!"

"No hard feelings then, Charles?" asked Toni bubbling with laughter at the boisterous proposal of marriage.

"None—Though you *did* set me back a few million dollars—"

"I'm seeking a favour, Charles."

"Irish, you sure got a nerve! You had a gun at my back and twenty-five grand of my money in your wallet last time I saw you—O.K.! O.K.! I forgive! Go ahead—ask your favour, Irish. It's granted. Now you and me, Irish—"



"Dear Charles, don't let's be too academical. I am sure you have a most delectable 'Irish' by your side at this very moment."

"Sure, baby, but she's Italian—Czech—Irish with blue Siamese-cat eyes, which isn't the right prescription."

"Charles, who is Orrery?"

For a moment the line was silent, then his voice came back, cold and curt as an Arctic breaker. "Irish, keep out!"

"Who is Orrery, Charles?"

"Now look, Irish—oh what the hell, I know you, you damnable female—And don't say I didn't warn you. Try Orrery's Art Gallery, 58th Street, Fifth Avenue, and good luck to you, Irish. You'll need it!"

"My! A nice address!" laughed Toni.

"Now you listen good, Irish—"

"Of course, Charles dear. Thank you for your solicitude."

"You're welcome, Irish, but no more favours in that direction, you understand?"

Promising a dinner date on some unspecified future occasion in New York, Toni rang off.

In the grand order of the U.S. rackets Charles Bellatti was in the Chevalier class, but not to be pernickety, there was a broad bar sinister in his escutcheon. Would Charles warn Orrery—whoever he was—that a big London operator, for such he assumed Toni to be, was interested in whatever racket lay behind the facade of a respectable Fifth Avenue art gallery?

Possibly.

Charles would be curious. Toni visualised him 'phoning from the table at his club. 'Find out what she's after, Orrery. Lay off the rough stuff. I'm gone on that dame'. Something like that. That would be Charles Bellatti's idea of chivalry. He had put Toni on a nine carat gold pedestal, because of her Prussian blue eyes and her 'Irish' colleen beauty—the pedestal might have been twenty-two carat had he not had the perspicacity to know he would be wasting his money.

So she knew Charles had talked to Orrery when she found

two men waiting for her in her hotel apartment in New York two days later. She had been in New York barely six hours. As she slipped into the room a man stepped swiftly behind her and closed the door: a second was sitting facing the door and nonchalantly swinging an automatic by its guard.

"I hope I haven't kept you waiting," Toni smiled, swiftly assessing the situation, and being in no way put out. Without a falter, without a momentary astonishment at the intrusion even, she continued to move into the room, peeling off gloves, smiling a little, acting normally, imperturbably unconcerned.

The man in the chair looked nonplussed and disarmed. The man at the door was gaping a little. Toni was beyond their comprehension.

It was surprisingly easy. They were not expecting anything like Toni—elegant, slim, blue eyes dancing with pure joy, graceful and yet swift as a tiger.

The brief skirmish ended with the gun in Toni's hands, one hoodlum bewailing a flurry of agonising movement, the other vituperative and angry, but otherwise immobile in the face of a steadily pointing automatic, behind which was a pair of most uncompromising, satirical eyes.

It was seconds only since Toni had entered her hotel apartment. Not a coherent word had been spoken.

"You won't be so careless next time," said Toni. "Neither shall I. Now you had better go."

They rose to their feet, moving slowly and warily, but they weren't fools, knowing there was neither nervousness nor indecision in Toni's grip on the automatic, and any idea they might have had about a sudden swift manoeuvre, they abandoned.

"Aw, come on. Let's go," said the uninjured man. "It'll keep."

When they had gone Toni threw the automatic onto a chair and sat down to consider this move on the part of the mysterious Orrery.

It would appear she was treading on sensitive toes, but more seriously, thanks to Charles, the other side was alerted and

as yet she had no clear idea how Orrery was connected with the stolen Paul Klee. The sooner she visited Orrery's Gallery the better.

Within half-an-hour of her decision she was at the gallery, and found it small and yet extremely exclusive. She recognised the trappings of connoisseur selectiveness in the pictures in the windows and on the walls inside, and the décor was unimpeachable.

What was she looking for?

She hardly knew.

There were several people in the gallery—well-dressed, quietly spoken, about whom was an air of complacent opulence. Salesmen in morning suits waited discreetly at a distance. Who would expect racketeering here? Yet she had crossed the Atlantic in the expectation that the Paul Klee had been secretly brought to this very gallery.

Slim expectation indeed!

And yet it had been.

That blessed, blessed banana!

Now all that remained was to take the Klee off the wall and send it back to England.

She could go to the police, but that would mean months, perhaps years of litigation, and endless expense before it could be returned to England. No! The police were definitely out. Or were they? She had a rather outrageous idea—

She left the gallery and finding a drug store along 58th Street entered one of its 'phone booths and dialled the local police precinct.

"Yes? Police," a voice answered.

"Give me the lieutenant, please."

"Who is this?"

"Orrery's Gallery," Toni lied.

"Hold on."

When the lieutenant came on the line Toni wasted no time in preliminaries. She said very brusquely. "In fifteen minutes time a valuable picture is going to be taken from the walls of Orrery's Gallery. You had better send a squad car imme-

diately."

She rang off and returned to Orrery's Gallery. As she entered she heard the police sirens in the distance—somewhere along Fifth Avenue.

"Good timing!" she congratulated herself.

She walked casually up to a quite unimpressive painting and lifted it from the wall. Thankful it was not so very big she set off with it towards the door.

So much then began to happen. Well, she had expected some sort of excitement, if not exactly a furore. There was a rush of well-tailored men from several directions, cries of expostula-



tion and a scurry of policemen through the plate-glass doors.

Amidst a great deal of confusion and shouting she quickly put down the picture on the thick carpet and with a charmingly deprecatory smile at the gesticulating crowd waited for the hubbub to subside a little.

"I'm Orrery!" stated a well-groomed man, slightly balding, middle-aged, hard-faced. "What gives, young lady?"

"Just hold it!" said a big police officer. "We gotta tip off—"

"Hells bells! I didn't call the cops!" yelled Orrery. "Look! I'll handle this."

"Not until I know what's going on around here. Now Miss. What are you doing with that picture?"

"This picture is mine," said Toni coolly. "I'm taking it away, that is all."

"Yours!" shouted Orrery incredulously. "You some sort of a nut?"

"Yes, mine, Mr. Orrery," said Toni looking at him in surprise. "Surely, you haven't forgotten! You sent your representatives around to my hotel an hour or so ago."

Orrery became quiet and wary. There was a sudden gleam of intuition in his pale eyes.

"Go on, lady. Don't leave us guessing," said the police officer. "I'm sure dying to hear more of this intriguing story."

"No explanations," smiled Toni. "None are necessary, surely, if I decide to remove something that is mine from one place to another. I am sure Mr. Orrery has now remembered that this is not his picture. Of course, if you wish me to prove it—"

The policeman looked at Orrery interrogatively.

"Go on," said Orrery tightly.

"I shall have to ask you to remove the canvas from the frame—" Toni murmured, slightly apologetic. "Very inconvenient, I realize, but as you know, Mr. Orrery, there is quite distinctive and conclusive evidence of the picture's ownership behind the—"

"The lady is right!" interrupted Orrery. "I guess I forgot. It's her picture all right. O.K. So she can take it away."

"Say, is this some sort of a gag?" asked the police officer indignantly.

"No gag!" said Orrery. "We'll take it round to her hotel, of course. No need for this sort of thing."

"No!" said Toni firmly. "I'll take it myself."

"Jeez!" said the police officer. "Lady, you sure do your shopping the hard way. Don't you want the fancy wrappings for your picture?"

"No thank you," said Toni, "And now if you will allow me—"

They more than "allowed" her: a policeman carried the picture for her, put her in a yellow cab and saw her away down Fifth Avenue, not a little puzzled, slightly sardonic at the peculiar ways of dames and dolls, and over all feeling chivalrous, manly and flattered, having received a rare and beautiful smile of appreciation from Toni as the cab pulled away into the traffic.

In her hotel room Toni stared dubiously at the painting. She didn't like it. It looked tortured and sad. The sooner she had it shipped off to England the happier she would be; and besides there was Orrery and behind Orrery somebody more powerful, who would very soon be chasing after the picture again.

She leafed through the New York telephone directory and found a packer and carrier with a reputable address. With typical American efficiency they promised to collect the picture within the hour and guaranteed shipment to England, undertaking all formalities—export licence, customs and insurance. Toni estimated three hundred dollars as the value of the picture and considered she was being more than complimentary.

She then booked her air passage back to London. She would have a twelve hour wait. In that time she guessed much would happen so one must be philosophical. She dressed for dinner and went down to the dining room, feeling very alone and vulnerable.

Why had she not asked Michael or even Timothy to accompany her? Or maybe rung up acquaintances and friends in New York? Of course she had been impetuous, but—oh well the

thing was done and now for the fireworks.

And again she was not surprised when two men quietly took the vacant seats at her table. One was Orrery, neatly dressed, very punctilious as if he had been expected by Toni; the other was a big man with an attitude of swash-buckling gallantry, dark eyes, and a fashion-plate smile.

"Do join me," Toni invited as they sat down. "I was expecting you."

Neither spoke, but Toni noticed that Orrery gave a quick glance round the tables, which were almost all taken. The other lighted a long thin cigar.

The waiter hovered, nonplussed.

"Come back—" began Orrery.

"Not at all," contradicted Toni. "These gentlemen are my guests. We'll order. I am hungry."

The man with the cigar gave her a hard scrutiny and, without consulting the menu the waiter offered, ordered for three.

"You approve?" he shot at Toni.

"Why yes. It sounds wonderful."

"Wine?" he said abruptly. "Do you have a preference?"

"Veuve Clicquot, Bruit Gold label, 1959," murmured Toni absently.

"As the lady says," said the other.

The wine waiter made his note with an appreciative flourish.

"We have not met before?" asked Toni when the waiter had left.

"No. I'm Roseman."

"Really?" said Toni, to whom the name meant nothing, though it was obviously intended to mean something.

"And Mr. Roseman doesn't like—" began Orrery.

"Shut up!" said Roseman. "I'll do the talking."

"O.K. Mr. Roseman," said Orrery crestfallen and subservient in a moment.

"Look baby."

"My name is Blake—Toni Blake," said Toni coldly.

"I know," snapped Roseman. "O.K. O.K.! Now Miss Blake, you might as well know the value of the Klee is peanuts

to me. What is three hundred grand? It's just that I like the picture."

So Michael had been right. Roseman was his crank collector and some sort of a big gangster into the bargain. She wondered where he kept all the stolen pictures.

"You'll never get away with it, baby—er *Miss Blake*," he said with sardonic emphasis on the name.

"You think not?" asked Toni seriously as if she were most anxious for his opinion.

Waiters arrived with hors d'oeuvres. When they had gone Orrery said, "Where's the picture?"

"Shut up Orrery," said Roseman. "I said I'd do the talking." Turning to Toni he said, "Why?"

"Why what?" asked Toni smilingly.

"Why come all the way to New York for one little picture? What have you in mind?"

He sounded aggrieved. Toni understood. Charles Bellatti had told him about the fictitious racket she ran in London and about her impressive gang of bowler-hatted city gents, who had so humiliated him over his attempted take-over of London gaming clubs.

Later, over duckling in orange sauce in the Maryland style, Roseman said, "Your organisation must be darn good to have got on to Orrery so quickly."

"It is," agreed Toni, her nose tickling in the bubbles of her *Veuve Clicquot*. Unkerleddy was truly 'darn good' in his shrewd Cockney way.

"You're pretty cool," said Roseman. "Considering."

"Yes?"

"I suppose your Limey boys are not far away. Pretty unobtrusive, I'll say."

"Oh yes," smiled Toni. "They are about. And Mr. Roseman, what are you going to do about it? I like the Paul Klee too. That is why I took the trouble to get it back."

"O.K." agreed Roseman. "That I understand. I'll pay you three hundred grand for it."

"Mr. Roseman, as you would say—peanuts! I am keeping



the picture."

"I might have known," said Roseman reasonably.

Over coffee and Drambui Orrery could contain himself no longer. "You're not going to let her get away with it?" he expostulated, somewhat querulously.

"Shut up," snapped Roseman. "I make the decisions."

"But—"

"O.K. Orrery. I'll explain very carefully. Now get this into your thick skull. We know from Bellatti, Miss—er—Blake runs a big organisation back in England—big enough to give Bellatti and his boys a big kick in the pants, which landed them right back where they started. Now that's some going—right? So we think when she arrives in New York she's up to muscling in over here. And what? She's just after the picture. She likes it. I like it. O.K. It belongs to somebody else. I had it. She has it. So what? Who's going to argue over a picture?"

"Very well put, Mr. Roseman," smiled Toni.

"Now Bellatti—oh skip it!" said Roseman. "There are other pictures in the world. Enough for both of us. You've earned it. Jeez! I didn't believe Bellatti. Who would?"

He regarded Toni with a mixture of awe and admiration.

"Who would have believed a dame—"

Orrery was still covertly looking round for Toni's body-guard.

\* \* \*

Toni received an urgent call from Twistleton at her Rotherhithe cottage.

"Miss Blake—Toni," said Sir Thomas and he sounded disturbed. "The picture has arrived. It isn't the Paul Klee!"

"Superficially—no," laughed Toni. "But I do apologise for not telling you. I am afraid I wanted the joke to go on a little longer—"

"Joke!" gurgled Sir Thomas and he sounded apoplectic.

"Well yes. The Paul Klee is behind the painting of—let me see—a peasant in a green smock, a girl floating in the air and

all the rest of it. Rather a silly picture. You had it in the exhibition, you will recall. The young artist, who painted the picture was persuaded by the Roseman-Orrery combine, I told you about, to steal the Klee and conceal it behind his picture, which he had prepared beforehand to receive it. I examined the picture in New York and it was an excellent job—I couldn't detect a thing. The Klee is actually between the peasant painting and a false canvas back. Roseman, I believe, is behind the recent art thefts. He has a penchant for modern art nobody will sell. The Klee, hidden behind the other picture, was dispatched quite openly to Orrery's Gallery—as, no doubt many others were, ultimately to go on to Roseman's collection, wherever that may be."

"But how did you find all this out?" asked Sir Thomas in bewilderment.

"Well, I have sources of information, but I had noticed the banana in the top left-hand corner had slipped round the corner a little. I noticed this on the day the Klee was stolen, but I am afraid, I didn't attach much significance to it at the time. Later when I thought more about it I realized it could only have happened if some extra thickness had been added to the canvas—the hidden Paul Klee, of course."



# THE ISLAND

JAMES BRADFORD

*The Cornish fisherman seemed to be genuinely alarmed by my intention.*

“**W**ELL, are you coming or not?”

Only the subdued splash of small waves against the boat's hull disturbed the silence as I hesitated. Now that the time had come to finally decide, I found myself uncertain.

But I knew that I had no choice. “I'll stay.” I replied.

The old boatman gazed steadily at me for some seconds, and I recognised in his gaze that he alone, by some strange empathy, really understood my conflicting feelings of reluctance and determination. He shook his head slowly, as though regretting the loss of a friend. “If you must, you must,” he said. “But I won't be back afore morning, mind!”

I shivered, although the air was quite warm despite the long shadows cast by the lowering sun.

“Here,” John threw his sweater at me. “You'll need this.”

I caught the sweater clumsily at knee-height—a bright contrast against the faded blue of my jeans.

“Aye, it becomes chilly of a night, even in midsummer,” commented the boatman. “Specially on this island.”

Anne put her hand on my arm. “Don't stay, Chris, not to-night,” she asked quietly.

“I must, you know that,” I replied. “If anything is going to happen, it will be tonight.”

Carol overheard. “Not me, I'd be frightened to death to be alone on this island . . .”

“Don't joke about it, Missie,” the boatman interrupted severely. “Get aboard, those as is coming. I want to be well clear afore nightfall.” He glanced at me quickly, almost fur-

tively, the kind of look one gives to someone involved in personal tragedy, curious but sympathetic.

Anne squeezed my hand, then scrambled aboard with the others.

I stood at the water's edge in the tiny bay as the small boat cleaved through the waves, heading for the Cornish coast. After the outboard-motor's note had died away, I watched until the boat was an unrecognizable shape in the distance, and when there was nothing but the sunlight sparkling on the water I remained there, looking towards the empty horizon. I was suddenly aware of my loneliness.

The hours before midnight had to be passed somehow, and I decided to walk around the island. I turned and went along the beach in the tall cliff's shade, and was glad to emerge from the shadow's coolness into the warm, late-evening sunshine. Here the sand sloped gently upwards to a low bank of earth, above which stretched the grassy incline of the low hill dominating the island's centre.

Passing by, I was surprised by my irrational reluctance to look up at the summit of the hill.

It was a pleasant little island, well-wooded and with fresh water flowing, but long since uninhabited. My professional interest as a lecturer in comparative religions had brought me to this part of the Cornish coast, and I intended to combine my holiday with an opportunity to examine the temple of an ancient heliolithic religion which stood on the summit.

The ring of stones was similar to Stonehenge, although smaller, but the striking difference to the structure on Salisbury Plain was the legend believed by the local mainland inhabitants. It was rumoured that each year, at midnight before Midsummer Day, the stone ring was again used for its original purpose.

Although sceptical, I found that the rumours added relish to my academic interest, and I was eager to see this neolithic temple where the pagan celebrants of a pre-Christian religion were supposed to gather and re-create the grisly rites of human sacrifice.

The Cornish fishermen seemed to be genuinely alarmed by my intention to spend a night on the island, and made a serious attempt to dissuade me. But since no-one in living memory had witnessed the ghostly ceremony, or even remained on the island after nightfall, I dismissed the legend as a product of superstitious imagination.

But now, alone on the island in the fading light of the evening before Midsummer-day, the superstition seemed more credible—there was a strange silence, at first difficult to analyse, but soon I recognised it.

There was no bird-song, no hum of insects.

The twilight was thickening, and the wooded shadows became breeding-grounds for a more fertile imagination. I quickened my pace in a sudden desire to reach the place where I had last seen my friends.

The island was not large, and it took me just under two hours to walk around it, but when I arrived back at the small bay it was quite dark. This was the point nearest to the mainland, and I lingered, drawing some illusion of comfort from the comparative proximity of my friends. I visualised an almost tangible scene of the bar-parlour in the small inn, the cheerful firelight glinting and winking on the polished copperware, throwing moving shadows on the dark-oak beams and furniture.

This mental image also revived less welcome memories—tales related by the Cornish fishermen, a wealth of folklore with a basic theme. “. . . they do say that not more than a twelvemonth after the monks had built their monastery, half-way up the hill, under the shadow of they stones, all of them become crazed, maddened by whatever there be on yon island.” The old fisherman’s gaze had wandered towards the window, looking beyond the coastline, out to sea. “Still there, they stones, standing in a circle.”

Any vague sensation of reassurance was dispersed as I recalled these tales. For the first time I conceived within me an echo of the fishermen’s superstitious fears, and an effort of will was required to direct my footsteps as I walked slowly

through the darkness which lay at the bottom of the high cliff.

Leaving the cliff's shadow I experienced an unpleasant sensation of vulnerability, as though exposed to the malevolent scrutiny of some hidden gaze.

I glanced around with quick nervousness and noticed, with sudden, heart-stopping shock, the huge eye of the newly-risen moon fixing me with a baleful stare from behind the grimly-stark rank of stones standing on the hill's summit.

When the thudding of my heart had subsided I walked up the gradual incline of the hill, and approaching the ruins of the old monastery I paused, wondering what had happened to the community of religious men, so strangely cursed ten centuries before. As I stood there, a sudden wind sprang up, and the trees dashed and danced as though in frenetic warning not to proceed further. I shivered, and was grateful to put on the sweater John had given me.

My watch indicated a few minutes after eleven, and I decided to shelter from the cool wind amongst the tumbled masonry of the ruined monastery. Whilst smoking a cigarette, it was impossible to prevent my imagination conjuring up the scene as it must have appeared up in the hill, within the circle of stones, in the greyness of Midsummer-day's dawn, some four thousand years ago . . .

A procession moving slowly between the stone pillars, the torchlight becoming pale in the slowly-brightening day. Priests dressed in animal's skins and wearing antlered headdresses escorting the helpless victim—aware of his approaching fate, but submissive, resigned—towards the altar, the sacrificial-stone . . .

I had apparently lapsed into a contemplative reverie, as it was only when fumbling for another cigarette and finding the packet to be empty that I became aware of passing time. It was ten minutes to midnight.

Standing up, I stretched my cramped muscles and shivered as I moved out of the fallen stones' shelter into the cool wind.

I walked up to the summit of the hill, and as I stepped between the pillars of the stone circle into the precinct of the

temple, the wind ceased as suddenly as it had sprung up.

There was no sound of hunting owls, no rustle of hunted animals, not even the movement of trees, yet in the silence I seemed to hear the low sound of pipes—eerie, ethereal. I strained my ears, but could not be sure.

My footsteps felt heavy as I walked across the short, springy turf; the silence was absolute, subtly ominous, and I was aware of my willpower and strength of mind draining out of me into that empty, menacing quiet.

My pace became slower and more laborious until I was forced to stand as though rooted, some dozen yards away from the focal-point of the monolithic circle, the sacrificial-stone in the centre.

Some irresistible attraction compelled me to turn towards the east dolmen, the archway of two upright stone slabs supporting a third laid horizontally, through which the first rays of the rising sun would shine, slanting down on the sacrificial-stone and the outstretched submissive victim . . .

And as I watched, a thick mist crept slowly through the stone archway, spreading out on either side towards me. The eerie pipe-music became more definite, and a cold prickling rippled across my skin. Through the mist the bright moonlight was distorted and diffused into a ghastly luminescence.

As the amorphous mist approached me, the paralysis was replaced by an external energy-force over which I had no control; I moved as an automaton to the unhurried advance of the creeping mist.

Some intangible pressure forced me to retreat; step by step I moved backwards, unable to resist the progress of the cold, dank mist, until my back touched the solidness of stone.

Without will or volition of my own I mounted the stone, and only then recognised that it was the altar, the sacrificial-stone. As though to an unspoken command I stretched out full-length on the altar, waiting, submitting . . .

The mist swirled around me, forming fantastic shapes. I imagined I could see figures wearing animal skins and painted masks, with horned headdresses, capering wildly around and

around to the monotonous plaint of the pipes, faster and faster. I had a vague impression of moonlight gleaming dully on an ornate knife poised above me, then it plunged downward, bringing darkness and oblivion . . .

\* \* \*

The wind blows gently, and the pale moon drifts serenely across the occasional clouds.

The mist has gone—if it ever existed outside my mind—and the pipe-music too. I find it difficult to recall how I imagined it to sound.

Climbing down from the altar-stone, I walk across the turf to the other side of the circle, between the pillars of stone, and descend the hill on the far side of the island, away from the mainland.

Down on the beach I sit and stare at the ceaseless peaceful motion of the sea, mesmerised by the rolling and retreat of the waves. Time passes slowly, the horizon brightens, but I am hardly aware of the growing light, and the steady note of the outboard-motor goes unheard until the final coughing roar before the engine stops.

Then I shake off my trance. The boat! They have come for me! The hill is steeper on this side of the island, and by the time I have scrambled to the top, they are already within the ring of stones.

They stand, Anne, John and Carol, around the altar-stone, heads bowed as though in contemplation.

"They're praying," I think. "Praying to the dark gods!" Aloud I call their name, but they do not answer.

Approaching, I call "Anne!", but she does not look up, none of them do.

Suddenly, the sun appears above the low mass of cloud on the horizon, laying a path of beaten gold over the water.

A shaft of light strikes through the stone arch of the east dolmen, to fall directly across the figure dressed in bright-red sweater and faded blue jeans lying motionless on the sacrificial-stone . . .



# THE MAIDEN LADY

BETTINE MANKTELOW

*For some reason she had opened this back door . . .*

Illustrated by Oriol Bath

**A** BRUTAL MURDER committed in a small village can be sure to fill the residents with fear and speculation, but two murders committed over a short period of time, and in very similar circumstances can be guaranteed to fill the villagers with horror.

The Sussex village of Twintrees is the sort of place to which people retire. Indeed the only occupation they could follow would be farming, apart of course from the vocations of the Church, school, Post Office or public house.

Miss Elizabeth Banks was the schoolmistress. She was not a native of the village but she had lived there for nearly twenty years so she had become accepted. Two generations of children had grown up under her loving care, and she was well known and well liked throughout the neighbourhood. There was an agelessness about her, which reflected the village itself. They both belonged to another more leisurely time when good manners were put far above money, and people were not ashamed to be sentimental.

Miss Banks felt right in Twintrees. It was an idyllic place. The swinging world outside had passed it by. Here there were no protests, no riots, no politics of any kind to disturb the peace. To be sure they voted once a year for the rural council at Mentmore, but they wanted no soliciting, no canvassers—they all resented strangers. A Market Research firm had sent a representative into their midst only a week or so ago, and he had found it difficult enough to illicit from them even whether

they preferred coffee to tea! They were a closed community.

The murders were, therefore, all the more horrifying. The first one had occurred in the yard behind The Hare and Hounds, and the victim was the attractive wife of the publican.

The Sylvesters were a gay pair, as became publicans, and it was the habit of the village copper to turn an habitual blind eye to drinking after hours in the Saloon Bar. It was, therefore, after midnight when Mrs. Sylvester went to lock up on that warm summer's evening. For some reason she had opened the back door, perhaps to let the cat out, and the attacker had been lying in wait for her in the dark and empty yard. The attack had been swift and silent, and she had been left dying from multiple stab wounds just outside her own back-door. Her husband was in the cellar and heard not a sound.

Distraught with grief the poor man had closed the pub and shut himself away for two weeks until after the Inquest. Unpleasant rumours went around that he himself was under suspicion, for hadn't many customers noted that Mrs. Sylvester had a roving eye?

But then the second murder occurred, to exonerate the publican and confuse the gossips. This time the victim was the wife of one of the poultrymen on Goodhew's farm. Nobody knew much about her except that she came from London, and was, therefore, looked upon as a stranger. She was neither well-known or well liked in her life, yet her death sowed disruption from one end of Twintrees to the other, coming as it did so soon after the first murder, and in similar circumstances.

Mrs. Milton had been into Mentmore to the cinema on her own, and coming home had left the bus at the main road and taken the short cut across Goodhew's meadow. There, by the stile, and hidden by the road, her assailant had overtaken her and stabbed her to death. Nobody had heard her cry out.

Now it was that terror began to supplant reason in the village of Twintrees. Suspicion divided them, friend and brother alike. The murderer could be anyone. He seemed to have no motive. He must be mad. Nobody knew where he would strike next.

Miss Banks was as uneasy as everyone else. After twenty

years she felt she knew the village community better than any-one. Teaching children in such a small place is like being a hidden camera in every home, for children's essays and guileless chatter reveal all the secrets and dissensions of their home-life which adults take pains to conceal. So Miss Banks, knowing the people as she did, was amazed by the murders as much as horrified. There was no-one, she felt sure, among the young lads she had taught who would be capable of murder. Oh, one or two had been rather wild as youngsters, but there had not been one juvenile delinquent among them, and they had all settled down in time.

The problem weighed upon her heavily, for the lives of those young people had been in her hands. Had she ever had a potential murderer in her class, she wondered. Had she made the mistake of not spotting an unbalanced mind? Or was he, after all, a stranger. Not that strangers passed through Twintrees any more, they passed it by, for the new motorway had sealed the village off from the main road. But a tramp or a gypsy might have hidden in the surrounding woods for some weeks without being found. Sometimes, one could see the smoke from camp-fires drifting through the trees as evidence of intruders in their midst. But what possible motive could such a person have for two ferocious murders?

Still with the problem gnawing at the back of her mind, Miss Banks was busy one early evening when P.C. Kenton stopped at the garden gate. He mopped his forehead in the close atmosphere and doffed his helmet.

"I hope you lock your doors at night, Miss Banks," he remarked by way of an opening.

Miss Banks smiled pleasantly. "Indeed, I do," she replied. "Every night without fail. I always have."

"Yes, but now—" insisted the policeman. "Now—"

"Oh, I know," said Miss Banks, determined to keep at bay the fear which his tone communicated to her. "I know we must all be more careful now."

"My wife—she don't even like me going to work," said P.C. Kenton sadly. "I've never known nothing like it in this



village—always quiet we've been. A law abiding lot they are as a rule . . . a bit of poaching, perhaps, we even had a rape once, but nothing, nothing like this."

"It is—sad," Miss Banks agreed.

"Sad? It's a tragedy. "Course it's put us on the map—news-paper men snooping about, and the Constabulary."

"Not Scotland Yard?" Miss Banks asked, with a hint of amusement.

"No, but they've sent some detectives from Mentmore—C.I.D. 'Aven't you seen them about—plain clothes men?"

"Yes, I thought I saw some strangers yesterday," Miss Banks replied. "I suppose I can expect to be questioned?"

"No doubt about it, Miss. They're going from house to house. They'll be here."

Miss Banks rested her gloved hand on the white wicket fence and looked down thoughtfully between the rows of gladioli and sweet peas.

"Any clues?" she asked lightly.

The policeman leant forward confidentially. "There is something," he admitted. "I suppose I shouldn't tell you—but with

you being the schoolteacher—”

“And therefore above suspicion,” she concluded for him.

“Yes, well, it seems as if the two victims had something in common . . .” He looked over his shoulder as if he expected an eavesdropper to pop out of the overhanging lilac bush, and lowered his voice almost to a whisper.

“The ladies, both of them, it appears, had something of a past . . .” he stopped for some reaction from Miss Banks but when there was none he went on. “Mrs. Sylvester—now she’d been married before, and the other one, Mrs. Milton, well nobody knew much about her past, even her husband. Then they were both about the same age, forty-five to fifty, and perhaps most important they were both of them strangers.”

“Strangers?” echoed Miss Banks. “Why, the Sylvesters have been here for at least ten years . . .”

“Oh, yes, yes,” said P.C. Kenton a little impatiently, “But they weren’t *born* here, were they? They weren’t like natives of Twintrees.”

“No,” Miss Banks hid a rueful smile. “But then neither am I.”

The policeman considered this for a moment before replying. “That’s true,” he admitted at last, “But we all think of you as being one of us. Funny that, I’d forgotten, like, you weren’t a native.”

“Does that put me at risk, too, Mr. Kenton?”

“Well, I don’t know about that,” said he thoughtfully. “Only I should keep your doors locked, anyway, just in case.”

Back in her warm, little cottage, Miss Banks shivered. A chill crept over her, producing goose pimples under her tanned and freckled arms. A horrible idea had occurred to her, too awful even to contemplate at first, but so persistent that she could not shut it out. A possibility, just a terrible possibility that she knew the identity of the murderer, together with a premonition that she was to be the next victim on his list.

When the light tap came on the door that evening it was not entirely unexpected. It was nine o’clock and Miss Banks had already laid down her library book and spectacles, and gone

into the kitchen to prepare her milk drink and find her sleeping pills.

Resolutely she went to open the door. The young man standing there was very tall, and his hair was crisply gold at the sides. In the gloaming she couldn't see his face properly, but she knew by his figure that he was young and fit.

"Yes?" she asked in her pleasant voice.

"Mentmore C.I.D.—may I come in?"

He flashed a badge before her, to which she paid little attention, and she went before him into the little sitting room of the cottage.

"Sit down," she said. "I was expecting you." She felt strangely excited, like the time she had cornered a ferret in the garden. She had wondered then who was going to win.

The young man sat in the largest chair by the window, and Miss Banks turned on the standard lamp so that she could see him more clearly.

He had a frank and open face with wide-apart blue eyes. He was handsome enough to make her start and look away quickly. There was too much male beauty for a spinster to behold, she told herself.

"Expecting me?" he said, suddenly realising the import of her remark.

"Why, yes—our police constable told me earlier this evening that you were bound to come here to question me. I expected, though, there would be two of you. Isn't that usual?"

There was something faintly mocking in her tone which puzzled the young man. She seemed to be enjoying a secret joke, entirely at his expense.

"It is usual," he agreed, "But we have such a lot of ground to cover, and there are so few of us . . ."

"And coming round at night?" Miss Banks chided him gently. "*Some* people might not open their door at all."

"No, and I can understand that, but we are working round the clock. You see, Miss Banks," the young man hesitated. "I don't want to frighten you but we feel sure that the—er murderer will strike again, our very presence here, in the village

at all hours, might deter him. It might at least give us time . . .”

“Don’t worry,” said the teacher softly. “I’m not afraid. Would you like a drink of something before we start questioning? There isn’t much I can tell you, by the way.”

“I don’t know.” He seemed to be disconcerted by her candour, the familiarity of her smile. “I can’t be long . . .”

“Just a drink,” she insisted. “I was just going to have mine. It won’t hurt you to relax. You look so tired.”

When she came back into the sitting room the young man had loosened his tie, and removed his jacket which lay across his knees. He was studying a small notebook minutely.

“I hope you don’t mind—” he began, indicating his coat.

“Not at all,” Miss Banks smiled at him. “Make yourself at home.”

He accepted the glass of chilled milk from her gratefully.

“Thankyou for being so friendly,” he said. “Most of the villagers rather resent strangers, so I’ve found.”

“Oh, but you’re not a stranger.”

The slightly indulgent smile which accompanied this remark again disconcerted the young man.

“Have we met before?” he asked, puzzled.

“I don’t know—you didn’t tell me your name.”

“Frank—Frank Young.”

Miss Banks put her head on one side, and smiled at him fondly.

“No, I can’t say I know that name,” she remarked.

There was a silence for a while in the little room with the cuckoo clock on the wall gently ticking away the seconds, and Miss Banks with her strange, fond smile, still smiling at the young stranger.

It was she who broke it.

“Now, how can I help you?” she asked.

With an effort the young man contemplated his note book.

“I wondered if you’d seen anything, anything at all, either on Monday when Mrs. Milton was murdered, or two weeks ago when Mrs. Sylvester met her death? Is there anything, anything at all that you can think of that was out of the ordinary, did you

see any strangers, did anything happen to you that now in retrospect might seem suspicious?"

Before answering him she took a sip of her milk. Then she wiped her lips on a tissue and gave a little sigh of satisfaction.

"Chilled milk is delicious in the summer, don't you think?" she asked. "Why don't you drink yours?"

"Oh—yes, thank you." His hand was cold from nursing the glass of milk, and he drank it all in one draught, and put the glass down on the table next to him. He drew his lips back over his teeth as if the drink had been surprisingly bitter. Then he turned his attention again to the little schoolteacher.

"Well, Miss Banks?"

It was quite dark now outside the window, as only the countryside can be dark, but with that peculiar stirring in the air, as well, alive with insects and night creatures. A large moth fluttered through the window and circled the lamp-shade, flopping soft wings in the circle of light, blinded and trapped.

"You think he'll strike again?" said Miss Banks softly, her eyes on the moth.

"I'm afraid so—" replied Frank Young, his voice equally hushed. "You see we think—he's looking for someone. Even in an unbalanced mind there is some kind of motive. This murderer, he isn't like Jack the Ripper. He doesn't give himself time to enjoy his murders, if you see what I mean. He just seems determined to kill somebody—perhaps both murders only *symbolise* somebody, which makes it more difficult to find him. On the other hand, there could be a particular person he's searching for . . ."

"He's unbalanced of course?" Miss Banks enquired gently.

"Oh yes, I'm afraid so . . ." the young man yawned suddenly. "Excuse me, I'm so tired," he said. "Now, Miss Banks—can you help us?"

"I'm sorry, Jeremy," said Miss Banks, sighing. "I'm afraid nobody can help you now!"

"Jeremy?" repeated the young man, confused and bewildered.

"Oh—don't play games with me, Jeremy. Don't you think I



know you?"

"I'm sorry, Miss Banks, I don't understand." The young detective wondered why his eyes were as heavy as lead, and why at such a time he suddenly had to encounter what his superiors would have called, a complication.

"If you'd just answer my questions, Miss Banks."

"You've grown up just as I'd imagine you would," she went on, ignoring his last remark. "You're a lovely young man.

Struggling against a desire to drop to sleep, Frank Young said to her. "If only you'd explain. I'm afraid I can't understand . . ."

"I always wanted to explain," said Miss Banks sadly. "I always meant to. You don't think I wanted to leave you with foster parents all these years, do you? Twenty-five years ago—oh, it's hard for you to understand now. I wanted to keep you, but I had to earn my living. I always meant to send for you one day. I thought perhaps I might marry—but you see, I didn't, and I began to love this village. I changed my name before I came here, and everybody knew me as Miss Banks. I had buried the past—except for you. I couldn't forget you. Sometimes, I used to think I'd send for you and pretend you were my nephew or something like that, but I thought it might upset you. The years went by. It was a pity you had to have so many different foster parents, I could see that was bad for you. Then, I used to think I should have had you adopted, but it was too late. And besides, they all said you were troublesome. . . ."

"Explain," muttered the detective from the depths of the largest armchair.

There were tears in Miss Banks's eyes as she cast her mind back over the past, and she began to walk around the room.

"I knew you'd wonder when you grew up—wonder about me—and your father. I thought I'd have to tell you, but I didn't know how. I kept putting it off . . ."

She found it difficult now to talk, and she turned her head away. She couldn't bring herself to look at the sleepy young man in the largest chair.

"He died—your father, before you were born. He—took his

own life! Hanged himself! There, it's out! You know. He just couldn't face the world when he knew about you. He was married you see." Her voice sank to a whisper, and she sat down again suddenly, collapsing almost.

"I don't know when I realised that it must be you—looking for me" She went on after a while. "This evening, I suppose. And yet, I had an idea before, a horrible suspicion . . . I couldn't believe that you really wanted to kill me. I heard all about your troubles. I heard about the girl who let you down because you were—you didn't know your father. The Martins wrote and told me. Remember the Martins? They were the kindest of all your foster parents, I thought. And then they wrote and said you'd been to see them wanting to know where I was, and though they wouldn't tell you you'd found an envelope of mine and seen the postmark. You didn't know my name, or anything about me, except that I lived here, and I hadn't always lived here. And so you set about finding me—but only to kill me! That was the hardest part to bear! You wanted to kill me! I don't know how you went about tracking me down. I suppose in view of the other women you murdered you pumped one of the gossips in the pub, so that you soon discovered who the villagers call "strangers" . . . but it's taken you till now to reach me, and I'm not going to let you kill me."

She brought her mind back from the past with an effort and her eyes rested on the slumbering form in the largest chair. Her sleeping pills crushed up in his milk had worked very quickly, as she had anticipated. But now what was she to do? Here he was, this double murderer, sitting opposite to her, sleeping like a child. He was beautiful too, beautiful like a child, and trusting. She could see in the lines of his soft, drooping mouth and the arch of his brows, she could still see the baby she had held in her arms nearly twenty-five years ago. How could she know he would grow up like this? His father had been neurotic, it was true. But this lad was psychotic. Imagine wanting to kill her! Wanting to take revenge on her after all these years! How could he know how her heart had ached for him! Poor, lonely child, pushed from one set of foster parents to

another, and always with the same complaint. He was difficult! She knew now she should have taken him with her, regardless of what the villagers had said. But had she done so, the respect she valued so highly, the job she loved, the affection of all her children, would have been lost to her.

But now—what path was open to her? He had to be stopped from killing. But if she handed him over all the story would come out. All those years, all her life, would be wasted. Besides, they would lock him up. Lock up for ever all that glorious manhood, to be dissipated in an institution. He would hate her even more in his lucid moments.

No, there was only one way. Only one merciful way to stop him. He probably had his knife hidden away in his jacket, but his large arms lay on his lap, and she knew she couldn't move him. Resolutely, she went out into the kitchen, and searched in the table-drawer. She selected a long-bladed carving knife which she kept very sharp, and went back into the sitting room. It was very quiet in there and still, with just the measured breathing of the slumberer, and the gentle ticking of the clock. She drew the curtains behind his head, and then turned to look at him.

What a fine head, like a young Alsatian, she thought, and what crisp golden hair, so like her own when young. But he was a double murderer. He was quite insane. It was merciful to stop him now.

Without giving herself more time to think she leant over him and mustering all the strength her small frame possessed thrust the long-bladed knife up between his ribs. His shirt was thin, and the blade travelled easily, splitting the flesh and releasing the blood. His eyes flickered open for an incomprehensible moment, and he looked at her amazed and horrified. Then, as she shrank away from him, he fell forward onto the floor, and the weight of his body finished the work she had begun.

He gave a spluttering kind of cough, and then was silent. Miss Banks began to cry. "I gave you life," she muttered, "So I took it." But the guilt clung to her like an extra limb. "Poor young thing!" she whispered to herself. "Poor young thing!"



Panic seized her. She felt like the fluttering moth trapped by the light. Now she was trapped, trapped by the past. The little cottage she loved hemmed her in. She ran blindly out of the front door, and down the path. She must find help. She must tell people. Surely they would understand. She had to kill him. It was self-defence.

She ran to the white wicket gate, which shone before her in the dark, but before she could reach it a figure detached itself from the shadow of the cottage wall, and ran ahead of her. A tall, lean, young figure racing beside her to the gate, turning and stopping her, clapping a large, brown hand over her mouth. And before she could scream, or shout, or even know what was happening to her Jeremy thrust the knife again and again into her trembling body.

This time, he felt sure, he had found the right woman.

# “OH, LET US BE JOYFUL”

A. W. BENNETT

*Reactions to any form of humour vary widely  
from person to person*

“**W**E HAD them rolling in the aisles” is an old theatrical boast. It didn’t quite fit us circus people, for we had them rolling with mirth even before they paid their money or got inside. We are not a tented circus but permanently sited in the Fun Fair on the promenade of this famous seaside resort. You’ve seen us, I expect. A wonderful position and the Laughing Man dominates it.

There he sits, crowned, enthroned in a large glass ball, holding his fat stomach in paroxysms of enjoyment, shaking with booming uncontrollable laughter, his boisterous bellowing billowing mirth hilarious, uninhibited—and infectious.

Times without number I’ve stood in the obscurity of our Booking Hall and watched the expressions on the faces of the crowds outside, observed how they react to the merriment of the Laughing Man. Mirth is my living—I’m Gurgle the Clown. So I study what makes people laugh. So many things. Another’s misfortune—the proverbial banana-skin. Some incongruity of dress or manner—a funny hat, a red nose. Jokes about sex. The list is long. Reactions to any form of humour vary widely from person to person.

Introverts are ashamed to laugh openly, think it demeans them. They approach the Laughing Man tight-lipped, determined to be unaffected by him, to show no outward sign of amusement. They watch, frowning, but the atmosphere of the chuckling crowd smoothes the wrinkled brow, tilts up the corners of the mouth, they move away before merriment overcomes them.

Extroverts burst into spontaneous ripples of amusement at the antics of the rubicund monarch even before they hear his

rumbustious laughter. Kiddies hop from one foot to another—a literal dance of joy unconfined.

So we have them in a good humour even before our show starts—then it's up to me and my stooge to keep them that way. We do, too, between the acts, Sid Ramble and I. Sid is a gay old dog, willingly takes his falls, slaps, kicks and tosses and water-sloshments. A lugubrious, crestfallen, heavy-footed numbskull in our act, under the grease-paint he's a natural slapstick comic who is quite content with his lot—stooge to Gurgle the Clown. His only failing—a fondness for the bottle.

It let him down last season just as the summer season was getting under way. Mr. Leen, the boss, sacked him and engaged Al Robens, a serious young man with great ambitions but no built-in sense of humour. Al had to learn to make fun, study to be a comic. A round peg in a square hole. Mr. Leen was glad when he skedaddled just as this season started.

"My fault, Gurgle," he admitted. "You were against me setting him on. You were right. He couldn't be relied upon. His deserting us like this without a word of warning proves it. And yet—I thought he was learning his trade; beginning to get some laughs. Get on to Sid Ramble and see if you can get him to come back."

The Boss was right. Al Robens was beginning to get some laughs. Mine!

Yes, mine. He was deliberately becoming a second Gurgle! A mini of me; a mimic of me. I didn't like it. He was here to be my stooge, to enhance my act, not to mimic me. Can't have two Gurgles in one show. So I killed him. They haven't found the body yet. Don't even know he's dead for sure. His relatives think he's maybe hopped it to some circus overseas. He's not even on the Missing Persons list.

Well, I didn't really kill him. Merely imprisoned him, you might say. He asked for it. He stole my gags, forestalled my antics, parodied my sleight-of-hand and revealed the trick to the spectators, humbling and ridiculing me by so doing. Me, Gurgle, the Clown. I was there to be laughed with, not at. He was reversing our roles. He even up-ended me from the plank

into the bath of water, where he should have been. He laughed like a drain at that. I thought Leen, the Boss, would have stepped in and had a word to say to him about that, but so long as the building shook with laughter he didn't bother or interfere. Leen would do anything for laughter. So would Al Robens. Probably the Laughing Man had something to do with that, for the outside of the building was enveloped in his laughter; every time the circus doors opened his powerful Ha-ha-ha's echoed into the cavernous interior.

Al was interested—obsessed, it seemed to me—by the antics of the Laughing Man, the contortions of the huge swinging body; the rolling, tossing head, half-shut eyes, perpetual rumbling chuckle mounting into tempestuous, overwhelming, Gargantuan roars of laughter. Even the mechanism interested him. Soon after he joined us I showed him how it worked, the rods, toggle-bars, rollers and circular track operating the tossings and turnings of the huge hollow body seated so majestically within its great glass globe—the sliding gear which lifted the glass ball so that the Laughing Man could be repainted. This is always done at the beginning of the summer season so that he can look his best when the show opens after the winter rest. During the winter the Laughing Man comes inside, on the circus floor.

A lively time it is in a circus before the opening night. New acts to rehearse, animals to train, attendants to engage, apparatus to test—and the Laughing Man to overhaul, repaint and instal in his position at the front of the circus. He's not touched after he's been put out there facing the crowds and the eternal ocean; merely switched on and off morning and night.

Al Robens reported for duty and told me he'd got some new ideas. The stooge shouldn't have ideas, that's for the clown. I didn't like Al's they were all modelled on my material. I hadn't seen Al all through the close season. When I'd had Sid Ramble as my stooge we'd lodged together during the winter. Matey, like. Not so with Al.

As we rehearsed I realised his grimaces were mine, his assumed voice mine, his intonations, gestures, make-up, antics,

shoulder-shruggings—all mine. No stooge, Al. Another, lesser, clown. Two of a kind. Not room for two of us in a circus for the whole of a season. I had to do something.

I did. A mechanic came from the manufacturers of the Laughing Man, a firm in the Midlands. Always, the day before the circus opened, he'd climb through the small door at the rear of the huge figure, and give the innards a good overhaul. Al and I were watching, me quite casually, Al with his usual concentration.

"Okay," the mechanic said, climbing out, "you're all set for another season. He'll laugh on as if somebody was tickling his fancy."

Al walked away without a word.

"Have a drink?" I asked the mechanic, as I did every spring.

"Don't mind if I do. Surly bloke, your mate. What's happen to the happy old fellow you had?"

"Sid Ramble. Got the sack a year ago about. Had a skinful."

"Pity. Don't think much of your new oppo. Too uppety. Hasn't spoken a word to me. Who's he think he is?"

"Alroben the clown," I answered bitterly. "He's already chosen his title. Doesn't seem to realise it takes years to learn the business."

We chatted for a while and I took the opportunity of taking an impression on a piece of cuttle-bone of the key which opened the door to the interior of the Laughing Man. When he'd gone I made a duplicate. His last words were about 'that snooty assistant of yours.' He said: "Tell him to go and get stuffed. If it was me I should clobber him."

Roben was a teetotaller. Late that night I drugged his coffee, opened the door of the monarch as he sat surveying his dominion, shoved Al inside. In the morning, just before it was switched on, I gave Al an injection which would keep him under for hours. A little later the giant figure started rocking and rolling and blasting forth his merriment to the four winds of heaven. His hilarity rang out far over the sea front and echoed amongst the buildings of the Fun Fair. Crowds flocked in from the prom. The holiday season had started again.



Naturally, Al Robens did not turn up for the afternoon performance; nor for the evening show. That's when the Boss said get back my old partner. I rang Sid Ramble immediately the circus finished—we'd kept in touch. The Fun Fair didn't close until midnight, so the Laughing Man roared on until then. I'd arranged that Bellamy Starkes, an old crony who imagines he's an electrician and does odd jobs like switching on and off the Laughing Man, to have a few drinks with me to celebrate Sid Ramble's return. "Al Robens has scarpered," I told him, "Sid is coming early tomorrow. We'll knock back a few noggins tonight to get into practise for drinking with Sid the Soak."

This we did, right royally. I linked arms with him as he set off on his rounds that night, or rather early next morning. He switched off fun machines, floodlights, and last of all, the Laughing Man. As we approached the King I felt impelled to burst into song, and as we drew near Bellamy joined me in a stirring version of Rollicking Bill the Sailor. Our rendering would drown very effectively any sounds that Al might be making, for we made the rafters ring; although I didn't think he'd be saying much after swinging round in the interior all those hours.

Tossed about like a pea in a whistle. There were no hand-holds in there. Dark as pitch too, he wouldn't know which up was topside. That would give him something to laugh about!

He wouldn't suffocate, there were tiny gaps underneath, where the pistons came through. Let him yell, while the recording apparatus bellowed his voice would be but a moth's whisper in a howling hurricane of sound. I intended to give him another jab before the Laughing Man was switched on again, he wouldn't by now be in any condition to get the better of me—but the libations of the night before made me oversleep.

Next morning, seeing my window unlit, Bellamy banged on my door. I threw it open. "What's the matter, Bell?"

"Nothing. Time to get up. I've got a thick head, how about you? I've gum on my eyelids, sand on my tongue and noises in my head. The Laughing Man has got the grunts. A lot of funny noises in his guts—I can understand me having bowels upset

after last night but not him."

"Just running-in sounds after the annual overhaul," I reassured him. "He'll soon quieten down."

Al did. We heard nothing unusual from the Laughing Man any more. Sid Ramble hurried along, got into his kit and immediately started practising tumbles, falls, somersaults, gambols. I'll bet you're doing plenty of that now, Al Roben the Clown, I thought. But nobody applauding you. Hear them laughing, Alroben? But not at you! Are you joining in the laughter? It's infectious—and you're nearest to it!

In twelve months the mechanic will open that door in the Laughing Man again. What will he find? Nothing but bones. Bones nicely polished by friction. I'd guess, after being jumbled round for all those hours, days, weeks, months. Like a plate in a dish-washer. You won't carry much flesh, Alroben the Clown. The only identifying things will be teeth and by then they will have fallen through the piston gaps.

Laugh, Al, laugh until your sides ache. You've an appreciative audience. Al, for hours every day they surround you laughing, roaring, shaking with mirth. Rolling in the aisles, chortling, giggling, belly-laughing, chuckling, bellowing, squirming. Millions of them before the season is over. All laughing but not one laughing at you.

You, Al, a better clown than me?

Don't make me laugh.



# THE PROMISE

D. FITZGERALD

*He wasn't going to break his word just because  
of some daft premonition*

“U H!” He opened his eyes and stared fearfully out at the world. His hands convulsed and gripped the arms of the chair he found himself in.

The glass domed clock on the chimney-piece. The blazing fire, its flames reflected in the eyes of the woman sitting opposite, knitting, looking at him. As the impressions flooded upon him, he relaxed.

“What’s up Joe?” she queried. “Did you have a dream?”

“Aye, I must’ve. Can’t remember now’t about it though.” He stood up and stretched. The clock chimed and he suddenly remembered. “I’ve got to go out Mary.”

She looked up quickly, anxiously. “It’s getting late, Joe—and it’s terrible wet outside.”

“Promised the lads I’d be there tonight. Finals of dart championship.” He didn’t want to go, he thought, as he gathered his pipe and pouch and lifted his old raincoat off the door peg. Strange that. He always enjoyed himself and looked forward to it every year.

“Mind you wrap up well, Joe—Joe? What’s wrong?”

He stood frozen in the act of pulling his coat on, staring.

This had happened before. The clatter of coal as it suddenly crumbled in the grate; the rubbery smell of his raincoat; Mary saying: “Mind you wrap up well, Joe. . . .” This exact moment had happened before, he was positive of it. A memory teetered on the edge of his mind almost revealing itself, then faded.

He shook his head violently and shrugged his coat on. “I must’ve had too much sleep. Felt right queer then.”

“Joe, you sure you’ll be all right?”

“Aye, luv. I’m only going down the road to The Anchor.”

He tied the brown woollen scarf she had made him and bent to kiss her brow.

"See you anon."

He hurried down the empty street, shoulders hunched to ward off the steady drizzle, hands plunged deep into his pockets. Crikey, he'd picked a fine night to go out! Still, he couldn't break a promise. The darts team from The Anchor public house were playing the finals tonight. Away at Bradford or thereabouts. He had vowed—as he did each year—he'd drink to their victory when they came back. If they had won, there would be a right old celebration.

He shivered. Not from the damp, but from an uneasiness that suddenly swept over him. A premonition. He wanted to go back, but hurried on.

With all the houses back from the road, invisible in the darkness he might as well be the only one in the world. He'd not seen sight nor sound of a living soul. Just him, the hissing rain, and the long curve ahead of the wet street. Like a river of liquorice beneath the orange glow of the sodium street lamps.

Joe had travelled this road to The Anchor many times. Since he had been old enough to guzzle a pint of beer. He was a regular customer right enough. Only never had the journey seemed so long. Never had he felt so . . . apprehensive. He would dearly love to have turned back; to sit dozing by the fire by Mary.

There were some folk that held you should always heed such feelings. They were warnings, they reckoned. No one would take it amiss if he didn't go. But there'd be some raised eyebrows, he'd be bound. "What, old Joe not come?" He could hear them now. "Old Joe's never missed a darts final yet." That's what they'd say. Well, he wasn't going to break a record just because of some daft idea. He'd most likely eaten too much of Mary's meat dumplings at dinner.

Not far to go now. Quarter of a mile maybe. He would soon see the traffic lights where the road joined the High Street, and the friendly red smudge of the pub's neon sign.

Again the premonition came, stronger; something *was* going

to happen. He faltered. Should he turn back?

Then he saw the lights.

He began to trot, fighting down the panic, the urge to turn back.

He waited by the traffic lights for a bus to pass. Fear clamoured at him now like beating wings. He hurried across the road and up the steps of The Anchor.

He peered round the smoke-filled room but there was no sign of the lads. He searched for a familiar face.

*Everyone was a stranger to him.*

Who was that behind the bar? Where was George, the governor? He had never set eyes on the man in the fancy red jacket and bow-tie.

Bewildered, he sat at his usual spot at the end of the bar. "Pint of bitter, please," he told the barman.

The man ignored him and continued talking to a customer. "Yes, every year about this time someone sees him. Or say they do anyway."

"Tell us about it," the customer said.

"Well he was a regular customer of this pub. Years ago this was, long before my time. Anyway he was knocked down and killed by a coach with his mates in as he left this pub."

The other grimaced. "That's a nasty piece of coincidence for you."

The steward nodded. "Yes, he'd been waiting for them to show up. The local darts team it was. They used to play the championship every year at this time."

"Have you ever seen the ghost?"

The barman whisked a cloth round a brandy glass. "No sir, don't believe in 'em. It's a good story though," he grinned. "brings in the customers."

Joe bridled. He had never heard such rubbish. When this young upstart got around to serving him he'd give him a piece of his mind. Making up stories like that! He looked at the large mirror behind the bar and searched in vain for his reflection.

Then he realized who they had been talking about.

# THE BELL

ERIC BALL

*An icy finger ran along his spine . . .*

Illustrated by Buster

**I**T WAS a heavy, oppressive night, a threatening storm hanging low over the flat Sussex plain between the south-downs and the sea. To the north, the majestic hills of the downs turned back the black clouds in a great uplift of air. To the south, over the sea, the ominous rumblings of thunder told its own story. The time was 11.45 p.m.

Joe and Sally Bestall, both in their early sixties, had enjoyed an evening at the theatre in Worthing and were now on their way home to Bognor. Since moving to the south coast a few months earlier to enjoy an early retirement, this was the first time they had travelled along the A259 at night, a narrow, winding and dark road, bordered on both sides by high hedges and tall trees.

Despite the impending storm they were happy, that June day in 1948 had been clear and warm until the storm had appeared, but even this could not dull their happiness. They had a new car, newly erected bungalow and no financial worries; what more could they wish for?

The first flash of close lightning cracked viciously across the sky, illuminating the narrow avenue of tall trees, a sight that the Bestall's loved. There was something beautiful about trees silhouetted briefly by lightning, a sight they were used to in their native Yorkshire.

"Pull into the side, Joe," said Sally. "Let's watch for a while."

Where the road widened a little, at a spot a mile east of Littlehampton bridge, he eased the car on to the grass verge; switching off the lights and the engine. Sitting in complete silence, they watched with awe the terrible power of the unleashed natural elements, flash after flash streaking across the

sky followed by ear shattering thunder.

The rain, as yet, had not begun to fall, and the car windows were wound fully down to allow air into the oppressive car interior. Suddenly, a fork of lightning crackled its way along the road some two hundred yards ahead, its nearness startling the Bestall's, "God, that was close!" exclaimed Joe. "We'd better move away from under these trees."

"Just a moment," replied Sally, pushing her head through the window to listen, she was silent for some seconds before she said to Joe, "that's strange! Why should anyone want to ring a bell at this time of night."

"What bell?" asked Joe.

"Don't fool about, Joe," she said into the darkness. "It's loud enough to hear a mile away between the thunder claps."

Again they fell silent as Joe strained to hear the bell between the rumblings of the thunder. "No," he said eventually, "I can't hear a bell."

Sally's next remark was little more than a whisper, her hand fumbling for, and finding Joe's, gripping it hard with fear, "I'm frightened Joe!"

Her fingernails dug into the back of Joe's hand causing him to wince. "Here, steady on Sally, you've never been frightened of a storm before, and it was you who suggested we stop and watch it."

Her voice rose a key with mounting hysteria as she leaned away from the window and close to her husband. "It's not the storm, it's that bell."

An icy finger ran along his spine as he said quietly, "What bell? I haven't heard any ringing."

Both her hands clawed at his now and she pressed tighter to him, he made to place his arm around her but before he could, she screamed. Switching on the interior light he saw her with her hands pressed over her ears, her eyes tightly closed as she screamed, "It's outside Joe, just outside the car but I can't see anything; nothing—nothing—" Another piercing scream left her lips and drowned the noise of the thunder as she flung herself at Joe.

Joe's presence of mind sent him into rapid action, pushing her away from him, he started the engine, switched on the lights and arrowed away from the spot. Not until they were a mile or so further along the road did he stop, taking his sobbing wife into his arms to console her.

She was in a pathetic state, rigid with fear and staring vacantly through the screen. "I heard it Joe, I know I did, it was as though it was being rung inside the car but I didn't see anyone."

"All right Sally, take it easy, there's nothing to fear now, let's go home and talk about it, what you need now is a good stiff drink."

She eased herself out of his arms and jerked herself under control, "I'll be all right now, you can drive home."

The night was spent in discussing the incident, but without arriving at a conclusion. Sally was adamant that she had heard a bell but each suggested explanation met with the same question. Why had she heard the bell and Joe had not? There was something sinister about the whole issue.

\* \* \*

It was Sally who suggested that the problem should be resolved by visiting the same spot again, at the same time of 11.45 p.m., her Yorkshire grit and curiosity overcoming her fear.

Seven times they parked on the same verge but neither heard nor saw anything, not until the eighth occasion, when they were returning from a day in Brighton, did the incident occur again. Parked on the verge and sitting tensely silent, they waited, at 11.57 p.m. Sally suddenly stiffened, her hand finding his arm to grip it tightly, "I can hear it Joe, it's coming from somewhere ahead and to the left."

Joe climbed from the car and stood beside the door waiting, barely breathing, his ears cocked for the slightest sound. A minute later he gave up and climbed back into the car, switching on the interior light he received a shock. Sally's face was deathly white as she leaned once again away from the open



window, her voice tightly hoarse, "It—it's just outside the car again!"

Eyes wide and jaws tightly clamped, she stared dead ahead, each second that passed tightened the muscles of her face until her face was screwed up and contorted. For perhaps ten seconds she sat rigidly rooted then slowly she relaxed, "My head Joe, it feels like it's going to burst."

"What happened Sally?"

She shook her head, "I don't know really, the bell clanged louder and louder until I felt I would faint, then it passed, the sound of the bell just seemed to pass on behind me. I can still hear it now but not so loudly."

He closed her hands in his and said, "Explain what it was like properly, I didn't hear a damned thing and I am—well, confused."

She wasn't frightened any more, a little pale perhaps, but in full control of her emotions as she replied, "It brought to mind when I was at school and the time bell, one of the teachers used to start ringing the bell inside the school then work her way across the playground, then she would enter the school again at the far end. This bell sounded like that, sort of coming in from a distance then passing me to fade in the distance."

Joe listened intently then said with a jerk of his head at the open window, "Now that's odd!"

"What is?"

"The thunder in the distance, there was a storm brewing the last time you heard the bell."

She had fully recovered now, an expression of puzzlement on her face as she asked quizzically. "Do you think there's some connection?"

He looked away shamefully. "There must be some explanation but I don't know what it is, all I know is that I am scared and I don't like it one bit." He started the engine. "Laugh if you like Sally but I'm frightened."

\* \* \*

Their next visit to the place was planned down to the last

detail, a nasty looking storm was approaching slowly from the south, and the late September evening was muggy with the officially announced bad weather. Despite his confessed fear, Joe drove on to the verge and settled back to wait with Sally.

At twenty minutes past midnight Sally complained of a headache, due, in her opinion, to the pressing heat in the car; she handed Joe the flask of hot tea. "Pour some tea please Joe then I'll take a couple of aspirin."

The drinking mugs were part of their picnic utensils, enamel mugs that made it difficult to drink the piping hot tea due to the hot rims. Sally accustomed her lips to the heat of the rim then popped the tablets in her mouth. Tossing them to the back of her throat with a characteristic jerk of her head, she raised the mug to her lips; then she froze. She and Joe saw it at the same moment.

Ten yards ahead, as they knew, was the narrow and overgrown turn-off to the village of Climping, from this turning appeared a man. A short thin man wearing a tri-cornered hat, a coarse shirt open to the waist and over this a heavy three quarter length black coat. He wore dark coloured knee breeches and light stockings with heavy buckled shoes on his feet.

In his left hand he carried a huge and wicked looking horse pistol, his right hand swinging up and down with a regular rhythm. At the top of the swing, just before the hand descended again, Sally and Joe glimpsed the hand bell. All this they could see by the aura of pale light that surrounded the figure.

Walking on the grass verge, he approached the car steadily, his eyes looking dead ahead and at a point somewhere over the Bestalls' heads, his right hand maintaining a regular swinging of the bell. This time Joe heard the ringing, two sharp clangs at the bottom of the stroke and one at the top.

To facilitate the pouring of the tea he had switched on the interior light, this showed him that Sally was shaking violently. Taking the mug of tea from her hand for safety he placed it alongside his on the dashboard tray in front of Sally. "Sally, are you all right?"

"My head," she muttered, "it hurts, it's—" she choked over

the aspirin tablets and coughed.

The man was less than a yard away now relentlessly continuing his chosen path. His right hand rose and the Bestalls' tensed to await the smashing of the bell on the radiator. Sally cringed back as it descended, her hands raised, but there was no crash. The bell and part of the man's arm passed silently through the front part of the car as though it did not exist.

Sally managed to say, "Ghost." Then she passed out completely, but for Joe's arm across her upper chest she would have fallen heavily forward. His wife safely supported, Joe could do nothing but watch the advancing figure.

The lower half of the man was completely hidden below the car, the bell and right forearm appearing only on the upswing, the eyes, flat and dead still looking over their heads.

For the first time in his life, Joe understood the true meaning of the word terror, he could not prevent the moan that escaped from his lips; his eyes popping as they stared at the figure. Another pace and a half and his eyes whipped quickly downwards, the pistol appeared through the dashboard followed by the left knee through the bulkhead; the pistol aimed straight at Sally's throat. The right leg appeared through the bulkhead, its lower half hidden by the car floor, the figure's head and shoulders lost above the car roof.

Joe's reflexes shot his hand out to divert the pistol from Sally but it passed through his flesh, on it came through his left forearm which still supported Sally, then it passed into her throat. The bell descended and still Joe flinched as though her shoulder would crunch under the blow.

With a feeling of helplessness and utter futility, Joe sat in trembling horror as the whole of the figure's body passed through his unconscious wife. Oblivion threatened to snatch away his senses but he fought it off, his body wavering then snapping upright.

There was no hesitation from the figure, it carried on through Sally into the back of the car, cutting through the rear seats then out into the night again. Joe, head twisted round, watched the man disappear around a bend in the road. For a full minute



he stayed fixed in that position, the searing sound of the bell still hammering at his ears, not until Sally groaned did he move.

Patting her cheeks gently and talking reassuringly to her, he brought her round, not until she had collected her wits and was able to support herself did he release her. Taking her mug of tea from the home made tray, he handed it to her, "Drink this pet, it will make you feel better."

She obeyed then spat the tea from her mouth with a dis-

gusted "Uugghh, it's cold."

Joe frowned deeply. "But a few seconds ago it was too hot." Even as he remarked on this he knew that the mug had been cold when he handed it to her, the fact had not registered at the time but it did now. Taking his own cup from the tray he sipped, the tea was cold, not just ordinarily cold but sufficiently so to set his teeth on edge."

"Good God!" he exclaimed.

"The flask Joe, try that."

With trembling hands he poured the tea away and replenished his cup. The tea was piping hot—too hot to drink!

They sipped at the hot tea in silence before Sally said slowly and quietly, "That pistol Joe, when it entered my throat it was like a piece of ice, just as he was when he walked through me."

"I know—" began Joe, then, in shocked surprise, "You were unconscious Sally, how could you know it was cold?"

A shudder passed through her as she realised what she had said, then, "I knew, I remember passing out but somehow I saw everything that went on, I saw you try to grab the pistol—" she shuddered again, "and I felt everything too until he had gone right through me, then everything went black, the next I knew you were patting my face and talking to me."

Again they fell silent, then Joe apologised, "I'm sorry I doubted you about hearing the bell but I heard it this time all right, when it got close it hurt my eardrums, in fact I can still hear it, so to speak."

She looked at him hard then asked slowly. "Are you certain that you heard it?"

"Of course I am, there's no mistaking it." Sally had lost some of the colour she had regained. Joe asked with concern in his voice, "Why?"

"Because Joe—this time I didn't hear it. Let's go home Joe."

It was ironic that the Bestall's should tell me, the writer of their experience. You see, I knew of the existence of the bell-ringer ghost many years before they moved south. I know six different people who have seen the ghost during the last twenty years.

The bellringer was employed by a gang of smugglers many centuries ago, a gang who used bad weather to cover their activities. Before the contraband was landed, the bellringer would tour the village of Climping, his bell ringing out a warning for the villagers to go to their homes and stay there until the all clear was rung. Anyone not obeying and trying to discover where the contraband was taken to would know the terrible wrath of the gang.

The contraband was rowed inland along the creek that still exists alongside the single village street, it was along this creek that the bellringer crept one stormy night. His orders were to go to his home after ringing the warning, to be notified later by a tap on the window when to ring the all clear. On this particular night, however, he disobeyed and followed, his greed too much to contain.

Foolishly, he took his bell along with him, watching the unloading at a nearby house beside the creek, he allowed the clapper to clang and betray his presence. A pistol ball quickly despatched him, now he is a ghost with a guilty conscience.

Often, when the weather is bad, he now walks the lanes ringing his bell.

What is odd about his presence when he is seen, is the fact that not all the percipients have heard the bell. Only four from the total of eight have heard that terrifying sound, the others have seen the bell swung but without the clear pealing. This, it seems, is decided by the amount of extra sensory perception that a percipient has been blessed with.

The village of Climping is now a day tripper's paradise, many thousands of holiday makers a week spend happy hours on the nearby beach. They are unaware of the historical drama that is sometimes re-enacted there, oblivious of the grip that the Sussex occult has on that area.

The bellringer is but one story of the true history of Climping, one incident that the villagers live with and say nothing about. I have spent twenty years living as a local trying to break through the barrier of silence, twenty years before I chipped my way past the Sussex people's reserve—and fear!

# THE MIDGETS

CHARLES POCOCK

*She just sits and watches, but he never touches her.*

**Y**ES, SIR, Fantin bought us—paid real money for us! No, you couldn't be expected to know that human beings are still bought and sold, you having nothing to do with this line of business. But then some people don't really believe we are human. So he bought us from an old bloke who was selling up, then at first used to show us alongside the sheep with six legs and the largest rat in the world. Kept us in straw, too, like the animals . . . stinking of piss and dung and disinfectant.

I'm smaller. She's two inches taller than me, three foot ten to three foot eight. And she's strong, could run a home with the best. Look, sir, we're not deformed, only small. That's true, sir. Midgets, they call us, midgets. Sometimes we hear the kids calling us dwarfs or goblins. People call out short-arse, or ducks' disease—you know, too near the ground to be healthy.

Well, then. The old man got me from a home, an orphanage, they called it. I was just eighteen then, and if I'd been normal size I'd have been out to earn my keep years before. But being so small they kept me there with the other kids, all of them younger than myself. I try to love children, sir, really I do. But always when I'm near them, sooner or later I think of that time when I couldn't get away from them. Because of my size I was treated just as they were . . . and all I wanted was to be by myself, think my own thoughts.

I did odd jobs about the place, ran errands, cleaned boots, until the old man came along. His name was Stabler. First he showed me on my own. Dressed me up in a pink velvet suit covered with those shiny things called sequins, I think. Then I was billed as the King of the Fairies. But it wasn't too bad. I used to help him tidy up the van or clean the booth, and sometimes he would let me touch up the pictures out at the

front. I liked doing that. Sometimes they let me paint and draw at the orphanage.

He picked her up from somewhere after I'd been with him for a couple of years or so. That meant a change of costume for me, because he billed us as the World's Smallest Man and Wife. Said if we were man and wife we might as well enjoy ourselves, so we should sleep together in the one bunk. But he couldn't really do otherwise, because there were only two bunks in the van, and he always had one to himself.

Then he began to get past it. Didn't look after himself as he should—got very dirty and smelly. And he began to forget things. We were often hungry because he forgot to buy any food, or sometimes even locked the food away without giving us any. At last he was forced to sell up, and that's when Fantin came along.

It's always been this way, ever since I left the orphanage. I've always been a sideshow at fairs. Do you know that Fantin keeps us locked in the van when we're not on show? He sleeps in a bunk at one end of the van, we sleep at the other. A couple of bunks. Fantin's wife used to sleep in one of them before she left him, but that happened before he got us.

Oh, yes, he feeds and clothes us quite well, we're valuable to him. But that's about all. Nothing but showing in the pen, moving on, day after day. Oh, except when he knocks me about. Seems to enjoy doing it. Puts me over his knee and tans me like a kid, laughing all the time. Don't know why he does it. She just sits and watches, but he never touches her.

At one time he used to go off and leave us locked up in the van for hours. Not now, though. He just sits and watches her. Watches everything, even when she's having a bath in that old tin tub. Just stares all the time, always looking at her. And she takes no notice, carries on just as if she were on her own.

I remember a man that came to see the show one night. Half drunk, he was. A great fat bloke with a huge beer gut in front of him. He leant over the rails, and prodded and felt us. He'd got a nasty puffy red face. Hadn't had a shave, either.

After the show was over he got Fantin to take him back to



the van. They took all our clothes off and stood us on the table. The fat bloke wanted to do things to her, but she fainted, and Fantin just managed to catch her. He took some money from the fat man, and told him to come back the next day. And he did, too . . . every day until we moved on. But Fantin always found some excuse for not letting him in after that first time. The last night he was really drunk, and tried to kick the door in. But Fantin and some of his mates beat him up and chucked him in a pond.

Did I tell you she had a baby once? I don't know much about it. Nobody's ever tried to tell me about these things. Anyway, one afternoon Fantin took her away. When he came back he told me that she would have to be cut open, as it was a big baby, not a midget. Then he closed the booth, and went to see her every day for what must have been weeks. I was kept locked up in the van while he was out.

He brought them back one afternoon, her and the baby. I got one look at it—it was a little girl. But that same afternoon he took it and put it in a home. And she just lay in her bunk, face to the side of the van. Wouldn't look at me—wouldn't look at anybody. But that was years ago.

Oh yes, you want me to tell you about the accident. I'm sorry I've gone on like this, but I don't often get the chance of a talk. Well, Fantin just slipped off the van steps—just fell and hit his head on a picket behind the booth. Didn't seem to be badly hurt—just lay there not moving. So they took him off in an ambulance after a while. Yes, sir, I'm sure it was an accident, we were standing just behind him in the van when it happened. She could tell you, but it's no good asking her, sir. She can't talk. She's deaf and dumb. Didn't they tell you, sir?

Fantin died this morning? Dead? And a letter for me was in his pocket. Would you read it for me, sir, please. I'm not very good at letters.

A will, is it? The van, the show, all his money . . . left to her and me. And what was that last bit? Read it again, will you, please, sir. Calls me what? "The little man that sleeps sound at nights."

# FOLLOW THE DEAD

ANTHONY A. RANDALL

*A cold, sickening sweat broke out all  
over his body . . .*

Illustrated by Oriol Bath

**F**ARRER'S EYES roamed over the pale blue walls, over the white ceiling and finally came to rest on the bougainvillea peeping above the window sill. He lay on his back, conscious he was alive, but unaware of the date or the time or how he came to be here.

Apart from the bed with its spotless white sheets and the table beside it the room was devoid of furniture. Farrer had a slight headache, felt vaguely afraid but too tired to give expression to it. His mind seemed reluctant to work.



With an effort that sent his head throbbing, he sat up and propped the pillows behind his back. Though disinclined to exert himself mentally, the nagging idea that he was in some kind of trouble, forced him to concentrate. He'd got to establish his whereabouts, nail the fear that he'd been abducted.

It was the faded and flaking green paint on the window shutters that set his brain moving; the brilliant sunshine and the clear blue sky that reminded him he was on holiday in the Alpes-Maritime of southern France.

The instant he had established that the mists cloaking his mind gradually evaporated and the events leading to his presence in this room began to unfold themselves with awful clarity. Yes, he had cause to be afraid . . .

It had been early evening on a mid-August day when Farrer drove over the viaduct on the Moyenne Corniche into Roc Village, a popular tourist centre east of Nice and close to Monaco. Far below the village, at the foot of the pine-covered mountain slopes, speedboats cleaving broad white arrows on the deep blue of the Mediterranean, presented a colourful picture far removed from the sinister circumstances that were about to engulf him.

Farrer carried his cases from the central car park across the road to the Lion d'Or hotel which stood on the corner within the shade of an ample plain tree. The bar and restaurant were deserted, but a smart tap on a bell brought a dark-haired, sharp featured waiter wearing a green apron from the kitchen. Farrer thought that the man looked untrustworthy, shifty.

"My name's Farrer. I've booked here for a fortnight."

The waiter nodded politely. "Ah yes, m'sieu. We are expecting you. If you will follow me I will show you to your room."

"Is it near my two friends—Monsieur Baines and Monsieur Ravenscroft?"

It seemed to Farrer that the colour temporarily left the waiter's cheeks. A hitherto unnoticed alertness appeared in the hazel eyes.

"They are no longer here, m'sieu." He leaned across the bar counter with an unnatural aggressiveness, a finger and thumb

sliding up and down the handle of the Conti instant-coffee machine.

"Not here!" Farrer said in astonishment. "I don't understand. We arranged as long ago as last winter to spend our holiday together at Roc Village—at this hotel." He paused, tongue running over his lips. "When on earth did they leave?"

"Mercredi—Wednesday."

That was two days ago, Farrer thought. "Where did they go?"

The waiter shrugged his shoulders. "I think Italy."

Farrer felt thoroughly angry that Robin Baines and Roger Ravenscroft should have departed like this without even leaving a message to say where they had gone. It was quite incredible—and intolerable—that they should treat him in such an off-hand manner. And so unlike them.

Perhaps rather unfairly he turned his anger on the waiter.

"Didn't you remind them I was coming? I said in my letter of reservation I was joining my friends."

He straightened up, clearly piqued by the criticism. "Come, m'sieu, how am I to know they have not already told you of their change of plans? Besides, it would be presumptuous—"

"Did they say when they would be returning?"

"Not to me—no."

"Did they square-up—pay their bill?"

"Naturally they paid."

Farrer sighed, shook his head, felt a sense of profound disappointment. For weeks he'd been looking forward to this holiday with Robin and Roger, discussed it with them both by correspondence and on the telephone. They had planned to hire a speedboat from the harbour authority at Beaulieu, do some deep-sea fishing, eat out at some of the fashionable restaurants and hotels in Nice, pay a visit to Monaco and tour the palace . . . Now it seemed he was going to have to spend his holiday on his own.

His room on the first floor overlooked a yard bordered on one side by the public Urinois which flushed its system noisily every two minutes, and on the other by the Gendarmerie

Nationale. At the back the mountains rose sharply to the Grand Corniche.

As soon as the waiter had departed Farrer lit a Gitanes cigarette and tried to figure out why Robin and Roger had left without telling him. It was so out of character. Both were thoughtful, courteous men . . . He had known them since their school days, saw them frequently. The arrangement between them had been absolutely clear—that Robin and Roger would drive down to Roc Village a week before Farrer. And now they'd vanished, without a word.

By seven thirty, when he went down to the restaurant, Farrer was more anxious than ever, convinced the waiter was a damned liar and that something unpleasant had happened to Robin and Roger. Unless they had had an accident, it was difficult to see what *could* have happened to them.

He ordered a Stella Artois beer, admired the floral designs on the red curtains and the starlights fixed in a fishing net draped over the wall by the kitchen. The juke box was playing "Sympathy", a disc that Farrer felt was not inappropriate.

There were two diners, both at the soup stage—one a young attractive blonde with large, blue, tearful eyes and a wedding ring, sitting on her own: the other a dark haired, sun-tanned man wearing a light drill uniform with a silver chevron on each black epaulette. On the table beside him reposed a black "pill-box" cap with a silver grenade badge.

A gendarme! Farrer reckoned he must be from the adjoining Gendarmerie. And no sooner had the thought flashed through his mind than their eyes met.

Farrer nodded, smiled, too shy to wish the Frenchman, "Bon Appetit!"

The Gendarme smiled back, sipped his soup and said, "Good evening, sir."

"You speak English?" Farrer said, ordering another Stella.

"A little—but very little. It is what I learned at school."

"You speak it very well. I wish I could speak French with the same facility as you do English."

"English is a very difficult tongue. The verbs—they are so

irregular. You say, 'He speaks,' then in the past, 'He has spoken.' And then you say, 'He goes,' and in the past, 'He went.'” A polite shrug of the shoulders. “You understand what I mean?”

Farrer grinned. “Doesn't *aller* suffer from the same irregularities?”

Over an excellent dinner of *salade de Tomate*, *Scampi*, *Pommes Frites* and peaches washed down by a *demi-pichet* of *Rose*, Farrer resolved to call at the *Gendarmerie* next morning and renew his acquaintance with the *Gendarme* whose name, he discovered from the barman, was *Fragonard*.

Shortly after nine o'clock Farrer rang the bell set in the gate post of the *Gendarmerie*. A pale blue shutter on the ground floor flew open and a bull-neck *Gendarme* with a cigarette between his lips and a row of ribbons on his chest called out, “*Entré, m'sieu.*”

At the reception desk Farrer discovered that the man was *Maréchal Jean*, *Commandant* of the *Roc Brigade*, whose English was non-existent.

“Is it possible to speak to *Monsieur Fragonard*, please?”

“*Fragonard? Oui, mais certainement!*”

When *Fragonard* appeared he was in civilian clothes and explained he was off-duty until midday. “I can help you in some way?”

Farrer told him about *Robin* and *Roger* and the known circumstances surrounding their disappearance. In the *Gendarmerie*, with an officer speaking over a short-wave radio in urgent terms to *Corsica*, it all sounded silly, thin and of insufficient merit to justify bothering the police. Farrer said as much.

“Oh, no. You are right to come,” *Fragonard* said. “You know something? Every year during the tourist season people vanish. Also, on the *Cote d'Azur* there is much stealing.”

“I didn't know—no.”

*Fragonard* lit a cigarette, inhaled deeply and stroked an eyebrow. “Your two friends. How did they come here?”

“By car.”

“They stay at the *Lion d'Or?*”

When Farrer nodded Fragonard went on, "What is the registration number of their car, please?"

Farrer had to think hard over that one. "00Z4 679 L."

"Make?"

"Rover 2000 TC."

With a sudden glance at the Maréchal, Fragonard peered under the counter and pulled out a typed schedule of car numbers which he checked down with the aid of a pencil.

He looked up sharply. "Your friends' Rover was stolen three nights ago from the central car park opposite your hotel. Yes, on Wednesday night."

Farrer felt a tingle running the length of his spine. "Who stole it?"

"Germans. Who else? They are behind the stealing that goes on." Fragonard glanced again at his list. "The Rover was stopped by a Sureté Nationale motorcycle patrol on the auto-route, for speeding. The patrol was then intrigued by Germans driving an English car with an English registration."

Farrer excitedly lit a cigarette. This information nailed the waiter's story that Robin and Roger had gone to Italy.

"Did the Germans admit to stealing it?"

"They had no choice. They confessed they took it from the car park at Roc Village. They said the keys had been left in it."

"Was there any luggage in the car?"

Fragonard shook his head. "Non. Until it is claimed, the Rover is in our garages at the back of the Gendarmerie."

The mystery got deeper and deeper. If Robin and Roger really had gone to Italy—and Farrer was positive in his own mind that they had not—they must have gone by public transport. Unless they had met some friends and gone with them. Possible. But that didn't explain their failure to leave some message.

"The head waiter at the Lion d'Or—is he to be trusted?" Farrer asked.

"Certainly. I know him very well. I have my déjeuner and dinner at the hotel every day." Fragonard stubbed out his cigarette. "You give me a full description of your friends and

they will be posted in France, Monaco, Italy and Corsica as missing persons."

When Farrer stepped out of the Gendarmerie the first person he saw was the hotel headwaiter coming out of the boulangerie with half a dozen loaves under his arm. The man was all too clearly surprised and anxious, guessing that Robin and Roger's disappearance had been reported to the police. With a crooked smile and a bow he hurried back to the hotel. Despite the heat Farrer shivered involuntarily.

The rest of that morning Farrer spent at Beaulieu bathing and admiring the mass of superb craft moored in the new harbour. It was after 12.30 when he returned to the Lion d'Or and found the Gendarme Fragonard in the bar talking to the headwaiter. Farrer ordered a Byrrh with ice.

"The waiter, whose name is Charles, seems to recall your friends, with their luggage, talking to two young English or American ladies in a red sports car on the day they left," Fragonard said. "It sounds as if they were all off for a few days together in Italy."

Farrer didn't believe a word of it. If it were true why hadn't Charles told him in the first instance? No, he thought, friend Charles had concocted this little tale since earlier this morning.

"You have posted them as missing persons?"

"Oh, yes, as I promised," Fragonard said. "Maybe, though, you are worrying too much. P'raps they found the girls a great attraction."

After lunch Farrer went up to his room to write a letter to his parents. It was hot up there and by three o'clock he felt thoroughly sleepy and slightly sick. He lay down, dozed off . . .

When he awoke it was dark and he was conscious of still feeling slightly unwell. A shadow moved across the window, a pencil torch shone straight into his eyes. A soft, guttural voice was saying, "All right! Lie still. I am Dr. Keisler. The hotel management sent for me."

"Ill?" Farrer turned his head to avoid the dazzling light, gasped as a needle suddenly pierced his right arm.

"Keep still. You have high fever. You must be admitted to



hospital for three, perhaps four days. The injection will reduce your temperature and help you to relax."

Farrer began to feel stimulated, confident, talkative. Doctors usually gave him an inferiority complex. Not now, though.

"Monsieur Farrer! You went to the Gendarmerie this morning. Why, please?"

"To report the disappearance of my friends. Something has happened to them. Know something? That damned waiter downstairs is a bloody liar. A bloody liar."

"Why do you say that, Monsieur Farrer?"

"Why? Because the Gendarmes told me their car had been stolen. Obvious, isn't it? If it had been stolen they wouldn't have gone to Italy."

"Where did they go?"

"God knows. But Fragonard will find out. He's efficient. Here! What the hell are you doing?" The needle was in again . . .

Farrer slumped back on the bed. Oblivion. . . .

And here he was struggling out of bed, stretching his arms, rolling his head to exercise his neck muscles, and still no wiser about Robin and Roger. He stood up, walked slowly over to the window and peered out.

The sun blazed down on a court yard in which stood a white Citroen ambulance. Very faint white lines indicated the parking places and a board on a rotting pedestal announced the area was reserved for medical staff. Nobody was about: indeed there was a pronounced atmosphere of decay about the place.

Farrer concluded that the building he was in was between the Basse Corniche and the Moyenne Corniche, to the east of Nice and west of Roc Village.

Having helped himself to a glass of Evian water from the bottle on the bedside table he decided under the pretext of shaving to explore the hospital and find out more about Doctor Keisler.

Once out in the corridor he was struck by the appalling state of decoration and the uncanny silence. Paint was peeling off the walls and ceiling and here and there plaster had fallen in.

This was no hospital, he told himself. Perhaps it had been once. But not now.

He found the bathroom, went in, shut the door and studied himself in the cracked mirror. He wished he hadn't. His face was the colour of putty, his eyes bloodshot and the fur on his tongue enough to give a dietitian heart-seizure. His one desire was to get out of the place; but first he must satisfy himself whether or not Robin and Roger had been here.

And then he saw the hairbrush lying on the tiled window ledge.

On its back, inscribed in silver, were the letters R.R.

Roger Ravenscroft! It was his brush. Farrer recognised it.

He stood like a man in a trance staring at those initials. A cold, sickening sweat broke out all over his body as the implications of his discovery became fully apparent. Robin and Roger had been taken ill, brought here by Keisler . . . The very silence seemed suddenly to shriek and scream, "Danger! Get out! Get going!"

Supporting himself against the basin Farrer wiped the sweat from his forehead. Why had the waiter lied? Why had this doctor Keisler been sent for? Why had Robin and Roger been brought here to a morgue of a hospital? Had they been taken ill after a meal at the hotel, like he had?

Farrer went into a shivering spasm. No doubt about it. Their food had been deliberately poisoned. But why? Why poison food just to make a person ill for a few hours?

He chucked his shaving tackle back into the washbag and was about to step out when he heard a voice from the corridor.

"Herr Doktor! Herr Doktor! Herr Farren has vanished."

Hurrying footsteps. "Impossible! Quite impossible!"

"Yes it is true. See for yourself, Herr Doktor."

"Mein Gott! He must be found at once. You understand?"

"Yes, Herr Doktor. But one thing worries me."

"What?"

"The Gendarme Fragonard. Suppose he enquires at the hotel for Herr Farren?"

"He will be told Herr Farren has left and returned to

England. His car was driven by Hans and Muller to Italy two days ago—without incident. We changed the number plate. Now find Farrer."

As the two men departed down the corridor Farrer slowly began breathing again. So there was some conspiracy between the Herr Doktor and the hotel regarding tourists, a conspiracy that landed them in this broken-down sanatorium on the Basse Corniche and their cars taken out of France and presumably sold.

He wondered what use a few sick—or deliberately sickened—tourist were to Keisler. All too clear that whatever the Herr Doktor was doing was highly criminal.

Farrer slipped quietly out of the bathroom and was half way back to his room to collect his clothes and tie the bed-sheets together with the object of leaving by the window when once again he heard footsteps approaching and voices raised in alarm.

In desperation he tried a door to his left, dodged in just as Keisler swung into the corridor.

The room that Farrer found himself in was in semi-darkness because the venetian blinds had been lowered, shutting out the direct rays of the sun. And there was a curious smell that he soon recognised as ether.

As his eyes became adjusted to the sepulchral gloom he saw that the centre of the room was occupied by a long work-bench on which stood racks of test tubes, pipettes and rows of bottles containing crystals or coloured liquids. In the far corner, under a central group of lamps, was an operating table.

And then he noticed three large glass jars on the bench. Each was filled with a transparent liquid, but the first two differed from the third in that they contained a variety of objects of varying sizes.

Curiosity at feverpitch Farrer peered into the first jar. For a couple of seconds or so he thought he was going to faint.

He was looking at parts of the human body—lungs, liver, kidneys, all healthy and in excellent condition. The second jar's contents were precisely the same.

He was in a dissecting laboratory. This was Keisler's business—exporting spare parts to hospitals and sanatoriums all over the world. Taking human life to preserve human life—and a fat profit too, no doubt. Something here for the news hounds and TV hawks.

Farrer swallowed hard, shivered, knew for a sickening and terrifying certainty the remains he was viewing were those of Robin and Roger.

Shaking uncontrollably he grabbed the door handle, and as he did so he heard the key turned in the lock from the other side. From the far end of the room a sliding door rumbled on its runners and coming towards Farrer, dressed in a gown ready for dissection work and holding a lethal hyperdermic needle, was Herr Doktor Keisler. Two burly assistants accompanied him.

"You won't feel a thing, Herr Farrer," he said. "I promise you. Just think, my friend, how your sacrifice will benefit suffering humanity.

An assistant flicked a switch and, gleaming under the electric light, the liquid in the third jar suddenly began bubbling excitedly.



# MR. KRAAN'S MOMENT OF TRIAL

B. M. GIBB

*In a dream you could do anything*

**H**E WAS stumbling frantically through trees. A forest of huge, black, close-set trunks and he had to force a path through the tangle of creepers and undergrowth. The feeling of being hunted was overwhelming. Run as he might he felt his pursuer move with him, silently, under cover of his own blundering flight. Flat, heavy leaves smacked sharply against his face and each moment he expected either searing pain or paralysing blow to send him lurching to the ground. He was about to scream when a sudden upsurge of consciousness snatched him from danger. Waking, he found himself in bed.

The heat of the summer night hung over everything in the darkened room bringing out the smell of varnish from the furniture, and heightening the odour of worn clothes in the open cupboard. Even the leather of his shoes placed carefully side by side under the bed exuded a richer scent than usual. Mr. Kraan got up and crossed the room. Behind the dressing table the curtain hung motionless in the open window. He lit a cigarette and inhaled deeply expelling the smoke in a rush, then, trembling, he switched on the light.

It was years since he had felt as frightened as he did now. The fear brought back the terror of the night thirty years ago when he'd fled the German troops overrunning Holland. That flight had also been prompted by fear. He had had no intention of helping his subdued country by joining the Free Dutch Army—or any other army for that matter. He was by nature extremely nervous and it had never occurred to him that any other course of action was open to him. The idea of being a soldier had frightened him almost as much as the thought of life under German control. And at the end of the war he had not gone back for fear of having to justify his hasty departure

six years earlier.

He sat on the side of the bed shivering and running his hand through his damp hair. He was fully awake but the nightmare persisted. Fear seemed always to have shaped his life. Not the awful, consuming fear of the nightmare, but a constant and inherent apprehension of difficulty. Throughout his undistinguished career he had kept a weather-eye open for trouble, and had taken avoiding action. The prospect of facing up to things, whatever they might be, was intolerable to him. Some might call it lack of moral fibre, but he had come to terms with his shortcomings and behaved accordingly. Only occasionally, when he wasn't on his guard, was he disturbed by a glancing suspicion that some time, somewhere, he might find himself in a corner which had no escape route.

He swallowed, and the dryness of his throat impelled him to make some coffee. The hot, comforting drink held the dream at bay, but into the temporary void crept a new anxiety. There had been another row that day with Simpson. He worried as he recalled the abusiveness of the head bookkeeper over an error. He sighed at the memory of Simpson striding into the general office, a sheet of paper in his hand.

"Kraan! What the devil have you done here! Only a bloody idiot would forget that Jones' item."

Of course he had apologised. Had even tried to redress the balance as he shuffled the papers on his desk.

"We can all make mistakes, Mr. Simpson."

"Indeed we can, Kraan, but you're the only bloody fool who does."

And the embarrassment of it had prompted Linda to sympathise.

"Don't mind him, Mr. Kraan. He's always like a bear with a sore head."

But he did mind Simpson, although he couldn't bring himself to cock even a mental snoot to the bullying manager. Simpson had never liked him and lately had gone out of his way to humiliate him. It wasn't as if the job was too much for him. He could cope all right. It was just that he passed the days

on tenterhooks waiting for the ill-mannered explosions to hit him. It was a vicious circle. The more nervous he was the more mistakes he made. Simpson, he guessed, was out to sack him. Not that he hadn't tried to get a new job, but his age was a problem. To get the sack would be disastrous even though it would mean relief from Simpson's taunts. If only Simpson would go, he thought, but there was faint hope of that. Gloomily Mr. Kraan stubbed out his cigarette.

Immediately the unease of the nightmare came back and the sense of foreboding scared him. There was almost a physical presence to it. He closed his eyes tightly in a mental effort to throw it off. It was obvious his feverish flight in the dream only reflected his desire to escape the daily dust-up with Simpson. Why then couldn't he rid himself of the conviction that it would return the minute he fell asleep? He shivered again and picked up a book. He'd read for the rest of the night.

Next morning brought a crisis at the office. At the end of a tirade of criticism Simpson gave him a week's notice. Miserably the day went by. At finishing time he put his books away and went out unheeding of the sympathetic glances of his colleagues. A cold, dogged depression possessed him. After a half-hearted attempt to eat some food he went to the pub at the end of the road. He would have a whisky, he thought, instead of his usual beer. When that was finished, he had another. At the end of an hour he rose carefully to his feet and returned to his room. A quite unusual rage had replaced the earlier depression. The injustice of losing his job rankled strongly. Simpson was a bastard. He undressed angrily while novel thoughts of retaliation formed in his head. The whisky, nullifying his instinctive caution, had caused a tentative self-confidence to unfold. Strangely satisfied he fell headlong into bed.

At once he was plunged into and enveloped by the dream. The familiar, frightening sensation of being hunted. His blundering flight. His leaden, stumbling steps through the undergrowth. Running, stopping, running on again. The same pattern repeated. He could actually see himself running. "It's a

dream," he cried. "It is only a dream." He tried to abort the nightmare. He tried to wake up. But a heavy, hindering stupor prevented it. Through the trees he pushed, the dense vegetation scratching his face and limbs. Then, as he glanced back, a movement among the dark trees immobilised him. Petrified, he saw a man appear. No need to see the features. He knew it was Simpson. Simpson advancing threateningly towards him. Simpson incongruously dressed as a Nazi soldier. Simpson in fury. He shook with fear. He would be killed! All round the forest extended indefinitely. In an agony of fear he raised his hands to his face. And in that moment revelation came. In a dream you could do anything. This was his chance. The moment for retribution. Exhilarated, he crashed his fist into the face of his tormentor and the jarring of bone on bone returned him to the waking world.

He arrived late at the office in the morning and found it astir with gossip.

"Morning, Mr. Kraan," said Linda cheerfully. "Heard the news? It's Mr. Simpson. He's had an accident. Broke his jaw—that ought to keep him quiet for a while." An expectation of stupendous achievement was confirmed in Mr. Kraan. He smiled.

"In any case, he won't be back here," she went on, "it seems the powers that be have heard all about him. You're to stay on of course. I bet you're pleased. These last few weeks must have been like a bad dream. Welcome back to the land of the living!"



"The best of men cannot suspend their fate:  
The good die early and the bad die late."

DANIEL DEFOE



# HAUNTING SHADOW

DOROTHY B. BENNETT

*Who wraps on the binder? Who lays out the corpse?*

**I** SHOT HER dead. The perfect murder. But she haunts me still. She stands just within eye-range, like a misty silhouette seen through frosted glass.

Ghost be damned; real. I'm mithered. Our minds were entwined, aligned on similar planes. Towards the end her brains directed half my actions, and it should have been the other way about. I detested her ways, her principles of living. So I stopped her living. But I can't control her in the hereafter so she drags herself around just behind me. On this mortal plane I was supposed to control her.

You see, I am a psychiatrist and psycho-analyst—trick-cyclist and mind-bender to you, I suppose—and Gladys Beck was put in my care by her G.P., Dr. Michael Bulper. Now I'm in her care apparently, for from the other world she watches me, haunts me.

Bulper could see full well that if I didn't give her a course of treatment then the police would. You can't go around committing all sorts of mayhem without coming into conflict with the law; and Gladys came from a very respectable family. Bulper said her father had been Mayor of the town, and her uncle was a Superintendent of the Police. I guessed it was because of her connections that the G.P. wished her on to me.

I've heard people say that it's unusual for a woman to be in my profession; but why so? A woman is in closer contact with human beings than any man; from cradle to grave. Who wraps on the binder? Who lays out the corpse?

I wonder why she can materialise and haunt and mock me now? Gladys, get back to where you belong.

Our mind-skeins became entangled like wool and our very being became wrapped together like the patterns in a compli-

cated carpet—I couldn't break adrift. Except by death, I thought, but it seems not even then.

Soon after starting treatment on her I wasn't responsible for my actions. She had control, not I. So I killed her. Yet there she sits, in that corner of this cafe, where I can't avoid seeing her. Yet I saw her cold and dead, mauled her body into the position I wanted it—and she's been following me ever since what I thought was the perfect murder.

She had a gift for painting—especially nudes. Male and female. She had a studio in what used to be a penthouse atop a block of offices; large swing window each side and roof lights. I booked a room in an hotel which overlooked that studio. The only other tall building was a block of flats at the other side. On the top floor there Philip Sower lived, one of her models—and her lover.

Gladys, go away, you're for ever in my hair, and you shouldn't be visible. I knew he was a member of a rifle club. I can shoot too.

One warm day the windows of her studio were wide open. Gladys was alone. I shot her at her easel, went to the studio, changed the position of the mahogany wardrobe and dressing-table—that is, put them each against the opposite wall—reversed the easel, arranged the body, dumped the rifle on the fire-escape of Philip Sower's flat, after wiping off my fingerprints.

He was tried, convicted, sentenced to imprisonment for an indefinite period. Gladys, I know you're a mirage, but you're playing hell with my nerves. It had to be Sower, of course. The bullet went through Gladys's neck, the easel into the wardrobe. They only had to follow the line of fire to know that it came from the top floor of the flats.

Go away, Gladys, you're coming nearer. And don't—don't—don't touch me, I couldn't bear that. I wish they hadn't brought in the no-hanging law, then your lover could have swung for you, and you two could have been loving together in Hell or wherever you should have gone and not be bothering me. Oh no, he doesn't bother me, but you do, Gladys. Why

you've even got the nerve to follow me into this cafe, and now, the very impudence of a ghost, to come and sit at my very own table!

This is the nearest you've been yet. That's queer, there isn't a hole in your neck. Hi, Mr. Man, why have you come to sit at my table? You're Superintendent Beck, a detective? And she is a police-woman who has been shadowing me? She isn't. She's Gladys, whom I murdered. Her twin sister Phyllis? I didn't know Gladys had a sister. That's why you adopted this subterfuge. I still think this is Gladys. Take her back to Hell, where I sent her. Of course I know what I'm saying. Take it down in evidence? Not Gladys. Her twin sister. Set a woman to follow a woman. That seems reasonable. Let me see her, break my nerve, follow me clumsily in fact, like an amateur or a ghost to a guilty person. No fingerprints on the rifle, if Sower's had fired his would be plastered on it. No hole in your neck Gladys—sorry Phyllis. Sower's fingerprints not there.

I didn't think of that. But Phyllis solved it? This Phyllis? I suppose you're sure this is Phyllis? Not Gladys? I can't get used to it. So this Phyllis noticed there was no gloss on the wardrobe, no polish, all dull as if it had had a lot of sun on it. But no sun ever got on to the wall where I left it. So she knew the furniture had been changed round. That was clever of her. It had got to be a woman to think of that. Plenty of polish, gloss on the dressing-table. Yes, I get the point. So you knew the shot came from my room. Good for you, Gladys; sorry, I mean Phyllis. So I must be the guilty one. Of course I am. How clever of you, Superintendent. You thought if I knew you knew and I found myself under surveillance I should crack up. My nerves go haywire? So you had her follow me—but don't let her touch me, Super, will you, I'm afraid she's still Gladys. Masquerading, could be.

A cell. Solitary confinement? That'll suit me, suit me fine. Alone!

Ha-ha, Gladys, that'll diddle you, goodbye. Come along. Super, escort me. Not you, Gladys/Phyllis whoever you are. Me for the dog-house, Super, and don't let her visit me in there.

# EVERYTHING IN THE GARDEN

JILL CLEMENTS

*Dreams of freedom came to her, unwillingly at first . . .*

**A**S THE smell of the bonfire crept into the kitchen, tears came into Martha's faded blue eyes. Her roses. Beautiful vivid blooms that had given her so much pleasure. Gentle perfume that reminded her of happier times. Now they were dead. Like the kitten she had once loved. Like the friendships begun hopefully when they first came to the district. Like the hope, years ago, that there would be children to love and care for. All had been killed by Ernest's cruel possessiveness.

It was remembering the kitten that started Martha crying silently and bitterly. The kitten had disappeared suddenly and Martha believed Ernest's denial that he could explain this disappearance. A long time later, she found a small skeleton buried in the garden. Then she knew the extent of Ernest's jealousy.

From that moment Martha began to hate her husband. She could find nothing good or loving in a man who could destroy a living, healthy creature.

Martha wasn't a vindictive person, but today, with the rose bushes dying and work on the new garage beginning, she wished that something would come along to destroy Ernest. She blinked the tears away, slightly horrified by such a thought. Yet she knew the garage could have been built on the other side of the house. But no—Ernest had watched Martha tending her rose bed and decided it must go. The roses were claiming too much of her attention.

Dreams of freedom came to her, unwillingly at first because she knew that dreams would not help her. Then, quite sud-

denly, Martha found herself staring at a small bottle on the window ledge. Ernest had brought the bottle home when he discovered that rats from an old building nearby were invading the garden. The bottle was over half full and labelled 'Poison'.

When Ernest came in for lunch he looked well satisfied.

"They've made an excellent start," he said, smiling his thin satisfied smile. "I told them that I expect to see the foundations completed and a good bit of the walls by the time I get back."

"Back?" Martha said, her plans becoming a little confused with his.

"Why yes. Don't tell me you've forgotten!"

Martha pulled herself together. "No. No, of course not." She pushed back a wisp of greying hair. "I just had something on my mind. Yes, of course, you're going to Manchester tomorrow."

She would have to work fast. Ernest would not leave for Manchester, but no one except herself would know that.

Martha had never tried to deceive her husband before and she was surprised at how easily the lies came. When he asked: "What is it you're worried about?" She replied: "Oh, it's just that Joan was expecting me this afternoon."

Joan, Martha's sister, was the only person Ernest allowed her to visit. He knew that if he didn't Joan would call to see Martha and this was something he didn't want to encourage.

"I was wondering what to do about dinner tonight," Martha said. "I may be late back."

"I don't see why. If you leave Joan's in good time."

Martha tried to laugh; it sounded artificial to her ears. "You know what the buses are like. I'd sooner know that if I'm late you can heat yourself a bit of dinner."

This pleased Ernest; he liked to hear proof that his comfort was being considered.

"I know what we'll have," Martha went on. "Curry. We haven't had curry for a long time. I can cook it all before I go."

Ernest smiled benignly. "As you wish, my dear. But please don't put apple in the curry. I'm certain it was the apple that gave me indigestion last time."

Martha enjoyed her visit to Joan, and it was getting on for ten when she eventually got the bus home.

She found the body of her husband lying on the kitchen floor. He was quite dead. She went into the garden to the site of the new garage. It was here that she would carry out the rest of her plan. The builders had already put a layer of rubble down—enough to conceal Ernest's puny body—and there was a further pile ready to be tipped in the next day. Then they would pour the concrete on and Martha would be free at last. Ernest would be part of his new garage. It was a fitting memorial.

When he failed to telephone from Manchester she would contact his Office, a worried, fussing wife. She would insist that they made inquiries. She would keep phoning them . . .

Martha worked fast by moonlight and soon had Ernest in his shallow grave. An unfamiliar feeling of excitement came over her as she replaced the rubble. No one would ever know there was a body underneath.

Martha slept well that night.

The builders' men arrived early the next morning. Martha watched them preparing to tip the rest of the rubble into place. There was a knock at the door.

"I'm sorry, my husband is away," Martha told the official-looking man on the step.

Another man appeared, and Martha listened to his words, horror creeping through her. They all went into the kitchen. Martha sat down, not daring to look out of the window.

"I'm afraid there's no alternative," the Council official said. "Your husband should have waited until the plans were approved. The site is unsuitable and the garage cannot be built there."

"We've instructed the men to remove the foundations," the first man said. "Please ask your husband to contact us when he returns."

Martha heard the sound of rubble being thrown back on to the pile.

"He will be returning very soon," she said slowly. "Very soon indeed."

# CROOKS IN BOOKS



## *A review of some recent mystery and detective books*

"THE VERY BREATH OF HELL",  
by George Beare (*John Long*,  
£1.25p).

Victor Stallard is a salvage man and if getting gold bullion out of an aircraft that has crashed into the Persian Gulf means that he will also be a combination of smuggler and pirate—then, so what? What, indeed, when the gold is worth 4 million dollars. With him and against him is Winslow who has pale hair cropped close, small pale eyes and a thin mouth with almost non-existent lips. Equally absent are his conscience and his scruples. Associated with both the men is a girl with the uni-sex name of Flanagan and the overwhelming sex of a woman six feet tall but statuesque, expensively sun-tanned and able to make a lemon frock by a famous cou-

turier look even finer.

And Shamel? In this case not a "he" or "she" but an "it". A roaring wind which starts hot and gains ever more flaying heat throughout its journey of 1,000 miles from its birth in the oven-red canyons of Jordan.

With gold to gain, heat to defeat and human greed as an inexorable driving force there is tension and drama of gripping type. There is also violent death in differing places—above water on a luxurious private yacht and below it in the eerie pale-green depths of the Gulf. And to effect it there are weapons equally varied, from a shark-spear to an automatic hand-gun that can be emptied in 20 seconds and can kill at 75 yards.

So who wins—wind, water or man? And between the men,

**PETER LOVESEY**

**The Detective Wore Silk Drawers**

Set in the seedy world of bare-fist boxing, this is a bizarre and gripping crime novel by the author of *Wobble to Death*, winner of the Macmillan/Panther First Crime Novel Competition. £1.40

**DAVID CRAIG**

**A Walk at Night**

An espionage novel with a very individual flavour about an escape route to the West for famous Russian writers. By the author of *The Alias Man*. £1.40

**ANNE MORICE**

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Following *Death in the Grand Manor*, this crime novel has the same ingredients of gaiety, ingenuity, mystery and terror. £1.40

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An extraordinarily authentic novel about the trial for murder of an African in Tanganyika in 1954. The penetration of some of Africa's secrets helps to unravel the mystery and add to its sheer excitement. £1.75

**ANNE HOLDEN**

**The Witnesses**

A married woman visiting her lover's flat witnesses from a window a sexual assault in the street outside. A story written with perfect irony to show the kind of web we weave when first we practice to deceive. £1.40

**Macmillan**



which of them? Exciting reading of powerful writing will produce the answer.

"THEIR MAN IN THE WHITE HOUSE", by Tom Ardies (*Macmillan*, £1.40p).

Vivid, racy writing makes this story of presidential power politics a lively one—and all the more so because the power concerned is a foreign one. But the plot is based on very human people and situations. It is to introduce someone who is an enemy agent into the household of David Marshall . . . who is both a millionaire and the presidential candidate considered most likely to succeed.

The scenes are set in Mexico, at Alamos, where there is money, luxury and a lot going on under the surface. Nearby is a very showy caravan in which is Charlie Sparrow who is supposed to be writing a book and who is certainly as perky as his name. Equally noticeable and uninhibited is his love life but it also has a significant place in the story. Very noticeable also is the would-be president's daughter who has green eyes and hair the colour of ripe bananas.

Behind the people is always the power-plot—bigger than they are and unlike them inhuman in its operation and ruthlessness. The

story has an unexpected twist which adds to its intensity and moves to its climax with swift action and dialogue which is as brittle and astringent as the ice-cubes and the liquor in the glasses in luxurious Alamos. In several ways this is an unusual type of book which will keep the reader guessing.

"THE CONCRETE BOOT", by Kenneth Royce (*Hodder and Stoughton*, £1.40p).

Royce's first book was published in America, subsequently translated for 7 other countries and also sold as a film—recommendation enough for the writer. In this one the first concrete boot is around the feet of Ossie Jenkins when he comes to the surface like a bloated crocodile and very dead. The second one is intended for Spider Scott, later in the story. With "form" in the Scrubbs behind him he is going straight in his own travel agency, through which at times "wanted" villains also go straight—into safety abroad.

Spider becomes involved in a giant "snatch" of parcels worth £2 million from an airport and a lot of the action takes place in it. Descriptions of the airport and its operation are given in fascinating detail; to go step-

# KENNETH ROYCE

## *The Concrete Boot*

"Tells of Willy 'Spider' Scott a crook trying to go straight by opening a legitimate travel firm. Unhappily he has reckoned without the attentions of a Soho gang leader whose speciality is to dump undesirables in the Thames with their feet set in concrete. Much villainy, tension and racy entertainment."

*Sunday Express*

£1.40

# DONALD E. WESTLAKE

## *Who Stole Sassi Manoon?*

Who stole the sexiest and most highly paid movie siren ever? It could be one of a number of zany characters in this fast-action comedy thriller which takes the reader on a round-trip of the Caribbean, with stops for laughs at Miami, Montego Bay and a desert island.

£1.50

by-step with Spider through the giant plane-travel complex is an entertainment in itself. In contrast to the jet-propelled birds is Penny, a very striking bird indeed. She has hazel eyes and something in her gaze which should have disturbed Spider. Later it does and by then he's in very deep danger. This is provided chiefly by Reissen who is described as being like a revolver with the worn trigger pressure too light—unpredictable and deadly.

In addition to fast planes there's fast driving under exciting conditions and amongst the cars a red Aston-Martin that stands out like a blood-clot. The story is swift-moving throughout with lively dialogue to match.

"COME OUT, COME OUT WHEREVER YOU ARE", by Thomas McCann (*Collins Crime Club*, £1.25p).

Beside the holiday beaches and amidst the gaudy brassiness of Brighton Jack Coover lives quietly doing his work and in an equally routine way accepting his wife's existence and solacing himself with an everyday type of woman as mistress. Then, like one of those distant rumbles of thunder that reach seaside promenades at times, there comes an anonymous telephone call. Others



HODDER & STOUGHTON

follow and so do letters, appearing in simple places but mysterious circumstances which make them ever more terrifying. Over-night, so to speak, the storm breaks with an attempt on his life and from then on Coover exists in an atmosphere of fear and suspicion.

Revelation of the identity of his enemy is remarkable; a warped mind thinks that it has been wronged by someone doing right—in a way that might be the lot of any citizen. The plot develops and takes the pattern of a macabre kind of hide-and-seek. The victim becomes ever more desperate with his pursuer hunting him down and taking equal evil pleasure in planning Coover's final ending and in gloating over his fear in the meantime.

Following the frightened and in some ways inept Coover as he twists and turns like a coursed hare along the holiday sands, down the pier, amongst the pin-tables and in-and-out of the sometimes tawdry side-streets of Brighton builds up a pattern of breathless apprehension for the reader. When his lady-friend is involved by the hunter and attacked she becomes a pawn in his game . . . until her part develops into that of an important piece with a major role to play.

Suspense and tension in plenty with also insight into an unbalanced and suffering mind.

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## CRIME IN FICTION

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### **DETAIL FOR THE DREAMER**

Harry Patterson

### **TOLL FOR THE BRAVE**

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## REISSUES

John Creasey

### **DEATH BY NIGHT SEVEN TIMES SEVEN DEATH ROUND THE CORNER**

21 June



£1.25 each

**JOHN LONG**

"DEATH IN THE LEBANON", by John Tyndall (*Geoffrey Bles*, £1.40p).

There is always a fascination in reading about foreign lands and this author knows the exotic and intricate Middle East well. He has the gift of describing visual scenes and capturing local atmosphere and while doing so uses them as background for an exciting story with all the tension of conflicting beliefs which turn well-meant religious beliefs into bitter battle-causes.

Lebanese, he tells us, often drive with their car windows open—so perhaps it isn't an accident when a car swerves violently on a mountain road and crashes into the depths with an important Muslim politician crushed beneath it. Then the holiday which Roger and Margaret Turnbull begin turns suddenly into a time of tense action and danger when suspicion about the politician's death falls first on a young Englishman and then on Lebanese friends of the Turnbulls, who are Christians. Beside a deeply-blue bay sparkling in the sunlight there is plot and counter-plot. The mountains which look picturesque in the golden afternoon light later take on a very different aspect when two men make a spine-chilling climb over them with bullets cracking the rock surfaces around them into splinters.

While human emotions and anxieties in a land of strong scenic appeal hold the attention there is always behind them awareness of religious ideologies combining with political intrigues to form hatred which threatens to explode into civil war. In total, armchair travel with a bang.

"ONE ACROSS, TWO DOWN", by Ruth Rendell (*Hutchinson*, £1.50p).

This is a story about people who are in general so ordinary that their impact is extraordinary. They pad as softly through the details of their everyday domestic life as a family cat might do—but one of them is a different kind of cat, a panther.

Stanley Manning is idle and shiftless. His mother-in-law regrets him but puts up with him until, coming to live with him and her daughter, it all becomes too much for her. She tries to get her daughter from him and he, even more forcefully, wants to part her from the very nice sum of money she possesses. Against this background the author builds up a pattern of dislike in which such simple matters as bickering over which TV programme to watch bring the people concerned into emotional crisis. But Stanley has

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an obsession for cross-word puzzles and his mind, developed by this, sees a pattern of action. Soon, a large sack which no longer contains peat is put into a hole in the garden. To say more about this would spoil the story and it develops in a way which takes control of the people and will hold the reader equally tightly.

The whole tale is told with a skill which is remarkable. The details of everyday suburban life are related with an unerring touch which is fascinating. Think of a TV and radio serial which combines *The Archers*, *Coronation Street* and *Z-Cars* and you have it here in print.

"THE ATTACK ON VIENNA", by Alan Nixon (*The Bodley Head*, £1.50).

A small-time actress applies make-up, changes her clothes, walks into a Zurich bank, signs a cheque in someone else's name and walks out with more than one million dollars. Ten seconds later she is murdered and robbed. That is just the first in a sequence of separate events, each with an impact as forceful as the succession of shots and blows which kill or knock-out one person after another with breathless frequency in this book.

The story is about an international gang of crooks who are skilled in high finance and who operate schemes ranging from obtaining vast sums of money stashed away secretly by ex-Nazi war criminals to a giant swindle at 9 Casinos. But whether writing about subtlety or violence author Alan Nixon has one special quality which should make him famous. He brings in one set of characters after another, places them in changing scene after scene and describes all with vivid phrases which give individual excitement and overall significance. To readers the effect is that of watching a juggler keeping coloured objects in rapid, unerring motion or of tapping a kaleidoscope and seeing one pattern of light and vivid tones flick into a different one in a matter of seconds.

The attack on Vienna is carried out by many cars which converge on it, with some of their journeys providing thrill-laden action which even the most ardent Rally enthusiast couldn't imagine. The purpose of their visit becomes plain when they put the city's traffic into chaos. For good measure the central characters in the tale range from virile and masculine Maver on the side of right to Greta Kaufman who has been Miss Germany and who is as picturesque, attractive, dangerous and callous as a jungle flower

closing fatally over the prey it has lured and trapped.

Read it in a comfortable chair—its pace, excitement and revolver-like action and events will make any other too restless to sit in!

"DEATH SUSPENDED", by Charles Whitman (*Cassel*, £1.25p).

Who's for tennis? For one, Douglas Gray of the Criminal Investigation Department of New South Wales; for another, his girl-friend Pat Morland. So they spend a pleasant week-end at a country-house at which a very unpleasant discovery is then made. A body is found hanging in an outbuilding . . . which would upset any house-party. What upsets this one even more is that the body is that of Isobel Gwynne who, married but man-mad, has been upsetting everyone from her too-tolerant husband to the men she has been upsetting by leaving them to chase others.

So when her head gets into a noose it could be one of her own making; particularly when it's seen that her body has been stripped of its clothing and left dangling quite nude. But Gray, shrewd and perceptive, thinks that it isn't a sex-crime. That what has been done and particularly the way in which it has been done suggests that this is more a matter

of jealousy and bitter revenge than one of plain, hot lust.

Several people become suspects and the spotlight of investigation and surmise plays over each, sometimes turning away only to return even more vividly and revealingly later. The tale is told in a way that is calm yet compelling with dialogue and comments from both characters and author which is always significant, often wry and ever full of insight into human emotions whether of love or hate, sympathy or revulsion. There are of course red herrings and false trails but they are those that Gray follows and the author always plays fair with the reader.

"SO DEADLY A WEB", by Ray Owen (*Robert Hale*, £1).

Ellis Brady went up like a rocket but came down like the stick. His book blazed into a best-seller but burnt itself into embers. His beautiful wife loved success and succeeded in finding it with another man. And when Brady, blind with rage, hit him that man failed—to go on living. So Brady went to prison and comes out to centre in this story as a man of potential power who has lost for the time being not only direction but ability to get under way.

That is, until he meets Janet



Fraser. She is a striking brunette with a lush figure and—the sparkling-plug to act on Brady's frustrated immobility—a woman's aura crackling around her like electricity. Brady willy-nilly becomes a ready vehicle for crooked Lerner, as loveable as a rattlesnake, to drive along a path of crime. This puts Brady into a boat cruising about a bay and picking from the water, far from accidentally, small bags which contain very valuable contraband.

But Brady is no fool and no weakling. His struggle to re-establish himself and to cope with the evil in which he finds himself enmeshed provides a mental and at times very physical conflict which makes a vigorous story. Adding to the impact is the fact that readers know, but Brady doesn't, that Janet is like the Roman god her name so nearly resembles . . . Janus. And he was two-faced.

"THOU SHELL OF DEATH", by Nicholas Blake (*Collins Crime Club*, £1.25p).

There can be few more unusual and in this case more effective combinations for an author than crime writer and Poet Laureate. Nicholas Blake/Cecil Day Lewis is both. This is a re-issue of a book published some years ago but it is far from dated; in contrast it has matured like a good

vintage wine.

There is a strong plot in which a one-time ace airman of a war is himself threatened but in times of apparent peace and then meets death. It looks like suicide and may be—but then it may also be when Cyril Knott-Stoman is found dead with a smell of bitter almonds in the air. More could be said about the forceful story and its widely-varied characters but in this case a different kind of merit from that of most thriller books can be emphasised—the mellow but at times witty and urbane but evocative use of words and phrases.

For example there is the immediately illuminating description of a man "with the impatient mouth of a confirmed raconteur". And that of Lucilla Thrale who is a "professional peach" and who made "even the bleak Somerset wind grow love-sick with her perfume". In light vein is the reference to a butler whose expression is so supercilious that "fitted out with moth-eaten hair and a good pair of horns his head could have been mounted on the wall" amongst those of the shot stags in a country house "and no one the wiser". And the reader's tongue will almost prick in sympathy with the man who in Ireland is offered by Widow O'Brien tea so strong that "ye could trot a mouse on it". In all, a story to gulp for action and to sip for flavour.

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